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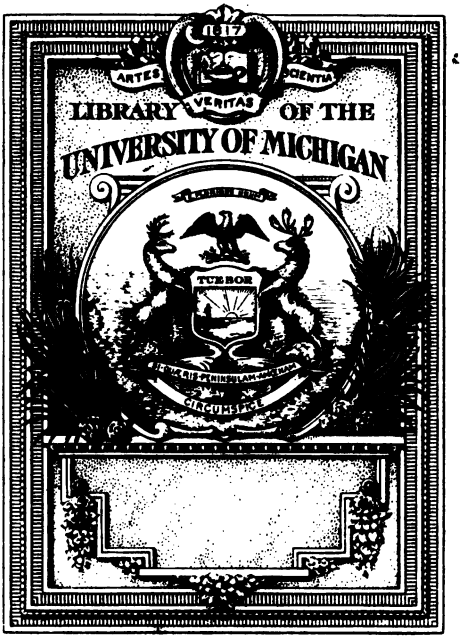

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Frank A. Saulsbury, Priest
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Xmas 1889.

Christmastide in St. Paul's

Christmastide in St. Paul's

SERMONS

BEARING CHIEFLY ON THE BIRTH OF

OUR LORD

AND THE END OF THE YEAR

By H. P. LIDDON, D.D., D.C.L.

CANON AND CHANCELLOR OF ST. PAUL'S

Surge illuminare Jerusalem. Alleluia

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TO

THE REVEREND ALBERT BARFF, M.A.,

PREBENDARY OF ST. PAUL'S, AND

VICAR OF ST. GILES', CRIPPLEGATE,

IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE MANY BLESSINGS

OF A FRIENDSHIP WHICH HAS LASTED FOR

FIVE-AND-THIRTY YEARS.

9-20-32 hwb

gift
Mrs. J. N. Davis
6-12-29

PREFACE

THE ground which this volume attempts to cover is somewhat larger than its title would imply.

Its central subject is the entrance of our Lord Jesus Christ into this world by being born of a human Mother. The sermons[a] which are devoted to the Nativity are preceded by two[b] for the Feast of St. Thomas. This Apostle, from his place in the Church Calendar, might seem to bid us halt on the road to Bethlehem, that we may learn from him something about that great grace of faith which enables us to recognize in Mary's Child the Eternal Word made Flesh. After Christmas Day there follow four sermons for two of the attendant festivals,[c] and six[d] for the last Sunday in the civil year. These naturally deal for the most part

[a] Serm. III.–IX. [b] Serm. I., II.

[c] St. Stephen's Day: Serm. X., XI. The Holy Innocents' Day: Serm. XII., XIII.

[d] Serm. XIV.–XIX.

with considerations suggested by the flight of time and the solemn issues of human life. Two sermons for the Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord,[a] and four preached during the season of Epiphany,[b] 1871, complete the volume. The last sermon[c] was published immediately after its delivery, at the desire of the late Dean Mansel.

In the present publication, the order of subjects which is suggested by the Church Calendar has necessarily been substituted for that chronological arrangement which was adopted in the Advent series.

May He Who took our nature upon Him, in order that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life, vouchsafe to bless some of the words here placed on record, that, notwithstanding the unworthiness of the author, they may help travellers along the road to their eternal home.

CHRIST CHURCH,
Feast of St. Matthias, 1889.

[a] Serm. XX., XXI. [b] Serm. XXII.-XXV.
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SERMON I.

THE INCREDULITY OF ST. THOMAS.

(FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT: FEAST OF ST. THOMAS.)

ST. JOHN XX. 25.

But Thomas said unto them, Except I shall see in His Hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His Side, I will not believe.

IF there is one characteristic more than another by which the Bible account of great servants of God differs from most of the biographies of good men in modern times, it is the fearless truthfulness with which the Bible describes the failings of its heroes. Generally speaking, a modern biographer is afraid to be perfectly explicit when he has to notice some less favourable side of a life and character on which he is engaged. He says to himself that his first duty is to be loyal to his subject, and that he cannot afford to play with topics which would imperil the feeling of respect or admiration which it is his object to produce. He leaves it to the critics to pick holes in the man whom he is describing; and so he touches weaknesses or faults with a gentle or a sparing hand, and throws all his strength into the description of what is plainly excellent and admirable. Too possibly, he finds that he has defeated his real purpose after all;

men say that they wanted a history and have been put off with a panegyric. But with the Bible it is otherwise; the Bible enumerates, with a dry simplicity, the failings no less than the virtues of the Saints. The falsehood of the Patriarch Jacob;[a] the murder and adultery of David, the "man after God's own heart;"[b] the cowardice and temporary apostasy of St. Peter;[c] even the impatience, as it might seem, on one occasion, of our Lord's Blessed Virgin Mother,[d]—are described in the Sacred Text without emphasis, but also without shrinking, when they have to take their place in the order of the narrative. One only Life is there in all Holy Scripture wherein no trace of imperfection is really discoverable; His Life, Who, though He was made sin for us, yet knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.[e] And thus, as Holy Scripture guides us to adore the Sinless Manhood of the Divine Redeemer, it puts into our mouths, generation after generation, the confession in which all, without exception, must join: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one unto his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."[f]

And thus it is that in to-day's Gospel[g] the great Apostle St. Thomas, who now reigns with Jesus Christ our Lord in glory, comes before us as illustrating, not a virtue, but a grave failure, and on an occasion of critical importance. That the doubt of St. Thomas was overruled, as the Church says, "to the more confirmation of the Faith," does not affect its intrinsic character; and St. Thomas is our example to-day, not as the Apostolic doubter, but as the Apostle who shows us how faith may

[a] Gen. xxvii. 18–24. [b] 2 Sam. xi. 2–17; Acts xiii. 22.
[c] St. Matt. xxvi. 69–74. [d] St. John ii. 1–4. [e] 2 Cor. v. 21.
[f] Isa. liii. 6. [g] Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle.

be reinvigorated, and doubt surmounted or dispelled. And thus in the Church's year, this Apostle's Festival fitly guards the approach to Christmas Day; since, at the cradle of the Divine Child of Bethlehem, faith must learn, as did St. Thomas in the upper chamber, to confess the Divinity Which is veiled beneath a Human Form, and to exclaim from the heart, as it contemplates the Divine Saviour, whether in His Infancy or in His Risen Glory, "My Lord and my God!"[a]

I.

St. Thomas, you will remember, was not with the ten Apostles on the evening of the day of the Resurrection, when Jesus risen appeared in their midst, and blessed them, and showed them His Hands and His Side. When they told Thomas of all that had taken place, he refused to believe, unless he himself could test the truth of their report. "Except I shall see in Christ's Hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His Side, I will not believe."

And here it may be asked, first of all, What is there to object to in this declaration? Is not this, it may be said, the language of a man who is anxious to ground his most serious convictions on a solid foundation; who, in a matter of such urgency, will not be content with second-hand information, but insists upon contact with and personal investigation of the facts on which his faith is to rest? May it not be argued that, by a singular anticipation, Thomas has caught something of the positive spirit of the modern world; that he is anxious, above all things, to escape illusions and to arrive at truth by experiment;

[a] St. John xx. 28.

that Truth is sometimes obliged to be peremptory and exacting, if she is to be equal to herself; and that the fingers of Thomas, thrust not irreverently into the Wounds of the Risen Christ, are the fitting symbol of a spirit of inquiry, which is not, therefore, irreligious because it is the sworn enemy of all forms of easy credulity?

This may be said, but an old answer must suffice. The declaration of Thomas, that he will not believe except he can have bodily contact with the Wounds which show that the Christ Who has risen is the very Christ Who was crucified, involves an unwarrantable demand upon the Providence of God. Why is a man to refuse to believe a fact which he had already good reasons for anticipating as very probable, and which comes to him attested by persons whom he is bound to trust, unless he can have it warranted by another and distinct form of proof? Thomas does not say that he *cannot* believe if he does not touch the Wounds of Christ; he says that he shall or will not. He betrays, by the very form of his words, his consciousness of the truth, that his believing or not is, to a certain extent at any rate, in his own power; and that he is thus making a sort of bargain with God, and is asking for better terms than he has before him. God, he thinks, might have done more for him if he was intended to believe in the Resurrection of Christ; and until his demand for more evidence is satisfied, he means to withhold belief. He sees, or thinks he sees, how much better the matter might have been ordered; just as Naaman thought that Abana and Pharpar would wash him from his leprosy better than all the waters of Israel;[a] just as the rich man in hell thought that if one from the dead went to his brethren they would repent.[b] And He Who prescribed the Jordan to the

[a] 2 Kings v. 12. [b] St. Luke xvi. 30.

Syrian leper for the cure of his leprosy;[a] and the words of Moses and the Prophets to the brethren of Dives,[b] as furnishing sufficient incentives to repentance;—He also ordered, by His Providence, that Thomas should hear of Christ's Resurrection from Apostles who had seen the Risen Christ, instead of seeing Him with them. Not to accept the report of the Apostles as sufficient was to challenge the wisdom of a Divine appointment; and for this reason, if for no other, the unbelief of St. Thomas is implicitly censured by our Lord.

It may be urged that the causes which determine conviction are not in a man's own power; that they belong to the world of intellectual truth, and could not be other than they are. And it may be further urged that the evidence of sight is better any day than the evidence of hearsay; and that Thomas was right in saying that if he was to believe in his Master's Resurrection, he must not merely hear that Christ had risen, he must see Him with his eyes and feel Him with his hands.

Here, it is plain, we are very nearly on the ground which was taken up by Hume, in that celebrated argument against miracles which was so much discussed by our grandfathers at the close of the last and the beginning of the present century. Hume maintained that belief is founded upon and regulated by experience; and that, while we often discover that testimony is false, we never witness a departure from the order of Nature. Therefore, Hume argues, "it is more in accordance with experience that men should deceive us when they report a miracle than that Nature should be irregular; and accordingly there is a balance of presumption against miracles so strong as to outweigh the strongest testimony in their favour."

[a] 2 Kings v. 10. [b] St. Luke xvi. 31.

This argument is from time to time reproduced, with inconsiderable variations; and it may detain us for a few minutes, both as lying in the path of our subject, and as having an intrinsic importance besides.

Hume affirms that the credibility of a fact or a statement must be decided by its accordance with the established order of Nature, and by this standard only. This would be true enough, if it were certain that there is no Being in existence above and beyond Nature; if Nature really included all existing forces. But if there does exist a Being higher than what we call Nature, and indeed its Author, of Whose mind and character we have independent knowledge, then occurrences which, like miracles, are out of agreement with the order of Nature, may yet be credible, if they can be shown to agree with the known attributes and purpose of this Being. An event, whether it be natural or miraculous, at once becomes credible when a sufficient reason is assigned for it; and a sufficient reason *is* assigned for a miracle, when it is shown to be in harmony with the character and purpose of the Being Who has created what we call Nature, even though it involves an innovation upon His usual methods of working, or, in other words, upon Nature itself. For all, then, who believe in the existence of God (and Hume himself was a serious Theist), the idea of an "order of Nature" ought not in reason to be considered sufficient to destroy the antecedent possibility of miracle, much less to overrule trustworthy testimony that a miracle has been worked.

Moreover, Hume's argument proves too much for his purpose. If the strongest testimony to a miracle ought to be rejected, because human testimony has sometimes deceived us, while we have never observed a failure in the order of Nature; then the testimony of our senses

to a miracle ought also to be rejected, because our senses, too, have, as we cannot deny, at least sometimes deceived us. In other words, we ought not to believe a miracle if we saw it worked before our eyes. If the "order of Nature," as it is called, may forbid us to trust the report of an honest eye-witness, it may forbid us to trust the report of our own eyes. But, then, if we cannot trust the witness of our senses, how do we know anything whatever about the invariability of the order of Nature itself? This very idea of a settled order of Nature is itself the product of a continuous exercise of the senses of many generations of men; and if the senses are to be credited when they report that order which is the rule of Nature, they do not deserve less credit when they report the exception to the rule. Though they may at times give us false reports, it is upon the whole reasonable to believe them; and in like manner, though the testimony of other men may be sometimes false, it may also be at least as trustworthy as the evidence of our own senses. Whether it is so or not in a given case must be held to depend upon the moral character of the witness, upon his opportunities of observation and of apprehending and describing clearly what he sees. If he tells us that he has seen a miracle, and if his character and conduct are in keeping with the requirements of this statement, then his testimony proves, at any rate to begin with, the conviction of his own mind. And this conviction is itself a fact which must be explained in some way or other; and if it can be accounted for in no other way than by supposing that the alleged miracle was real, then it is not merely reasonable, but necessary in reason, to believe the miracle upon testimony, the claims of the "order of Nature" notwithstanding.

And this brings us to St. Thomas, protesting to the

disciples who had seen Jesus Risen that he would not believe the Resurrection till he had seen and touched the Risen Redeemer. Why should he refuse credence to the report of his colleagues? St. Thomas certainly would not have held that there was any order of Nature which could bar the possibility of miracle, since he believed in an Omnipotent and Living God, and would not have shrunk, like the Deists of the last century, from what is involved in this belief. But he would not believe the startling report that his Crucified Master had left His grave; not because the Resurrection was a momentous miracle, but because he could not take it from others upon trust. And yet there were not wanting grave reasons for his believing the ten Apostles, the two disciples, and the three women who said that they had seen the Lord. Had not Christ said that He would rise from the dead? Had He not appealed to the old Jewish Scriptures, and given His Resurrection as a sign of the truth of His mission? If a miracle was ever to be looked for, was it not to be expected here? If God, Who had made the order of Nature so generally invariable, might be expected to interfere with it for the highest of all purposes that we can conceive—this, surely, was an occasion for His doing so. Had Thomas enjoyed those months, and even years, of close companionship with Jesus without perceiving in Him that which, to say the very least, might warrant on His behalf, and on behalf of His cause and work, interference with the accustomed laws of God in Nature? And was it reasonable or reverent summarily to reject the assurance of his brethren that such an interference had taken place?

It may, indeed, be asked why Thomas should not have been permitted to see Jesus Christ after His Resurrection, as the other Apostles saw Him; had he done so, no ques-

tion would have been raised, no hesitation experienced. In like manner men ask why the evidence for Christianity is not greater than it is; why it is not, as some would say, so compulsory and overwhelming that the mind cannot set it aside without conscious absurdity.

The truth is that the evidence for religion is just what it is and no more, in order to satisfy reason, rightly informed and disciplined, and yet to leave room for faith. If we could not help believing in Christianity there would be no occasion for faith; we should accept the Creed by exactly the same act of the mind as that by which we accept the conclusion of a problem in Euclid. As reasonable beings, we should have no choice about it; and our faith would imply nothing whatever as to the condition of our affections or characters. God has made the evidence for Christianity less than mathematical, because He desires to make faith a test, not only of the soundness of our understandings, but also and especially of the condition of our hearts and wills. These do contribute to the complex act of faith, while they have nothing to do with an act of pure reason. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness."[a] It is because faith is thus a criterion of the state of our affections, and of the direction and straightforwardness of our wills, that it is represented in the New Testament as being a cause of our justification before God.[b] It could have nothing to do with our justification if it were only a necessary act of the understanding; but because it is much more than this; because it belongs to conduct as much as to thought; therefore the evidence for Christianity is of such a character—sufficient, yet not compulsory—as to allow for the play of those moral dispositions which, combined with the understanding, enable a man to say, "I believe."

[a] Rom. x. 10. [b] *Ib.* iii. 28, 30; iv. 18–25.

II.

But if the unbelief of St. Thomas is instructive, his faith is still more instructive. When Thomas laid down conditions under which alone belief in his Risen Saviour would be possible, our Lord was pleased, in His love and condescension, to take the Apostle at his word. A week after the day of the Resurrection, Jesus appeared among the assembled Apostles, when Thomas was with them. Thomas had said, "I will not believe." Now he saw. He saw that Form, those Features on which he had gazed in bygone times with such reverent love; he heard that Voice, with whose accents he was so familiar, and which he had for the moment deemed silent for ever in the grave; and he was thrilled, we may be sure, through and through. To have seen his Risen Master at all would have been overwhelming; to have seen Him after denying that He was risen, after resisting the witness borne by others that He had kept His promise,—this must have passed all word and thought. And when, instead of reproaching Thomas, Jesus accepted his terms, and bade him "reach forward thy finger, and behold My Hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My Side: and be not faithless, but believing,"[a] what an agony of confusion and self-reproach must not have taken possession of the Apostle's soul!

Thomas might have resisted even yet; conviction was not forced on him: had his will been set on resistance, there were at hand ingenious reasons for resisting. But, in truth, the sight of Jesus was enough; he had no heart to hold out against the Presence and appeal of the Most Merciful. He did not reach out his fingers towards the

[a] St. John xx. 27.

Hands and Side of Jesus. But as there was now no room for faith, properly speaking, in the Resurrection of the Body of Jesus from the grave, since the Risen Jesus was before his eves, his faith embraced the Divine Person Who was veiled beneath the Human Form before him, and he cried in a transport of adoration, "My Lord and my God!"

We may have known men who, in Thomas's place, would have acted otherwise. For a return to faith is often rendered difficult, if not impossible, by a subtle form of pride. It is not the coarse self-assertion which outrages good taste, if it does not shock the moral sense, but the quiet vice which mimics a healthy self-respect, and which actually led the Jews to reject Jesus Christ, that is the foe of reviving faith. For such pride aims commonly at two objects; personal distinction, and freedom from public criticism. A believer, as such, can hardly be very distinguished; his faith places him on a level with millions who share it; with poor, simple folk who make no pretension to being wiser than their neighbours, still less wiser than the Bible, or than the Church. But an unbeliever may imagine himself, I do not say with what justice, to see a great deal further than the mass of people around him; he piques himself on being superior to their prejudices, and on living in higher spheres of thought. And therefore, when Christianity, as God's message to the human race, visibly commends itself to multitudes of men, that is a reason with him for rejecting it. And if he has already rejected it, this reason becomes very strong indeed: the conceit of singularity is reinforced by the pride of consistency. If he returns to faith, he will have to admit to himself and to others that he was wrong in rejecting it; wrong in supposing himself to be more far-sighted than others. This admission costs

him too much. Thomas certainly had to own to himself that the demand to see and touch the Wounds of Christ was unwarrantable. But in that Sacred Presence there was no room for self, and he surrendered at discretion.

Much more do grosser vices hold back the soul from a return to faith. A man who is yielding to them willingly cannot afford to treat the evidence for Christianity with intellectual justice. The Gospel reproves and condemns him; it makes bitter his cup of pleasure; he has no part in its promises; he cannot mistake the import of its warnings. He has, therefore, a strong motive for wishing it to be untrue. In these matters the will generally contrives to make the understanding do its good pleasure; so that infidel reasoning, which affects to be a disinterested effort of intelligence, is sometimes really prompted by desires that have nothing whatever to do with intelligence. Besides this, vicious habits blunt the spiritual perceptions of the soul; they eat out its finer sensibilities; they are fatal to its capacity for seeing moral beauty; and this puts out of reach one of the most striking of the Christian evidences; that which is based on the perfection of our Lord's Human Character. And thus men have come to regard the most tender and attractive mysteries of the Christian Creed with something like disgust, and they catch eagerly at misrepresentations of its import; they welcome objections to the reasons by which it is defended, and even repeat jests at its expense. Into such a soul, we are told, "Wisdom will not enter, nor dwell in a body that is subject unto sin."[a] No such motive would have kept St. Thomas in unbelief: but it is too common to be overlooked in our own day.

There are, of course, other causes which may keep men

[a] Wisd. i. 4.

back from faith; causes for which God, in His Justice and His Mercy, will make, we may be sure, due allowance. Such are an unhappy education, perhaps by unbelieving parents or guardians, or intimacy with unbelievers of great mental ability, or a constitutional frivolity of judgment, and not unfrequently, though this is little suspected, a morbidly active imagination which cannot acquiesce in the idea of fixed and unalterable truth. Not least among these causes, too, is unconscious ignorance.

Men who reject Christianity often do not know what the case for it really is. They have been familiar with Christian language, with the language of the Bible, it may be, for years; and they mistake this familiarity for real knowledge. They do not reflect upon it, so as to see its harmonies, its ample moral justification, its depths beyond depths of interconnected truth. Living as they do upon the surface, they are impressed by apparent difficulties about it; they ask to put their hands into the print of the nails if they are to receive it. He Who stood before Thomas waits to appear, by His grace, in the centre of their souls. But whether they will adore Him if He does is an anxious question.

Doubt of the truth of Christianity is more common now than it was twenty-five years ago; and there are writers and speakers who would fain persuade themselves and others that, far from being a misfortune, such doubt is a healthy and interesting condition of mind. We often hear quoted these lines of the Laureate—

> "There lives more faith in honest doubt,
> Believe me, than in half the creeds."

Doubt is treated as a symptom of intellectual activity, while faith is assumed to mean stagnation; doubt is described as mental life, faith almost as mental death;

doubt is the herald of progress, faith the symptom of uninquiring adherence to the errors of the past.

My friends, this is not the language of whatever is best and most thoughtful among us. In the early years of manhood, when spirits are buoyant and health is unimpaired, when as yet no dark shadow has fallen across the path of life, and the sun shines so brightly that it seems as if it might shine on for ever, it is possible to sing in these lyrical strains the apotheosis of doubt. But pass a few years of life, till the first great gap has been made by death in the home circle, and the first great heartache has settled on the soul; till some sharp shock of illness has laid bare the frailty of the tenure by which we hold to life, and has opened before the mind's eye the illimitable vistas of that eternity which lies beyond the tomb. Ask yourselves then, whether it is better that the hand which lays hold on the Unseen, on the promises of the Eternal God, on the work of the Crucified, on the grace of His Spirit and His Sacraments, should quiver and tremble, than that it should grasp its Object with a firm and unyielding hold.

No, brethren, doubt is not health, it is disease; it is not strength, it is weakness. It is moral weakness, and it is religious weakness. Moral weakness, because it shivers or paralyzes those great convictions which impel men to act virtuously, and which sustain them during the stress and pain of action. No man acts with decision upon a motive which one half of his mind accepts, while the other questions or rejects it. As St. James says, a man with two souls or minds is unstable in all his ways.[a] He cannot make up his mind, for he has no one mind to make up. And while he is balancing helplessly between the conflicting views which in their

[a] St. James i. 8.

equipoise produce the doubt, the time for decisive action passes, and nothing has been done.

Doubt is moral weakness, then; but much more is it religious weakness! Religion is only possible when the soul lays hold upon One on Whom it depends, and to Whom it is, and feels itself to be, bound by the double tie of love and submission. But when the soul's grasp of the Perfect Being is weakened, loosened, if not forfeited, by doubt, then Religion correspondingly dies away, and the soul sinks down from the high contemplation of what is above it, into the embraces of that material world which awaits its fall, in order to complete its degradation. Faith, believe me, is the leverage of our nature; and doubt shatters the lever. Do not let us waste compliments upon what is, after all, only the disease and weakness of our mental constitution; like those savages who make a fetish of the animals or reptiles from whose ravages they suffer. Let us resist, let us conquer it. And if we quote those lines of the Laureate already referred to, and which are not altogether free from a touch of paradox, let us remember that his hero, if he passed through the pain of doubt, yet

> "Fought his doubts and gathered strength:
> He would not make his judgment blind;
> He faced the spectres of the mind
> And laid them: thus he came at length
>
> "To find a stronger faith his own." *

As you leave this Cathedral, you would have seen, in the North-West Chapel, if the light had sufficed, a painted window which represents the subject of to-day; the Incredulity of St. Thomas. That window has been erected within the last year to the memory of the late Dean of St. Paul's, Dr. Mansel; and, as it has seemed to me,

* *In Memoriam.*

Dean Mansel claims a special place in the thoughts and prayers of those who knelt beside him of old, in this his Cathedral, on St. Thomas's Day. Each of us has his appointed work in life and in the Church of God; and the achievement by which Dean Mansel is best known to the educated world is his application of the principles of the so-termed Philosophy of the Unconditioned to the solution of some difficulties supposed to lie against the claims of Revelation. That particular enterprise, brilliant as it was, roused at the time a storm of controversy, and the discussions to which it gave rise have not yet died away; nor, indeed, considering the enduring interest of the subject for serious thinkers, are they likely to do so. But his greatest work was wider than this, and, we may dare to say, of more certain and absolute value. No man probably in this generation had explored more perfectly the capacities of the human mind, considered as a reasoning instrument, than our late Dean; no man certainly knew better how to turn it to account; as we read him, there is a combination of strength and delicacy in his method of handling abstract argument which marks one of the princes of the world of thought. And yet the truth which he felt most keenly, and which he laboured in a hundred ways to impress upon others around him, was the very limited range of our mental powers when dealing with the vast subjects that surround us; with the heights and depths, the immeasurable and eternal things which form the subject-matter of Religion. He had no patience as a reasoner with the preposterous demands for unattainable kinds of proof in those awful regions, or with the puny and self-confident logic which essays to scale and storm the Throne of Christ, only because it has not yet discovered the measure of its own prowess. And thus he himself could enter the courts of

the Kingdom of Heaven, because he had learnt that the temper of a little child was not less dictated by right reason than by religion. Eight years have passed since he was laid in his grave; since he entered into that life where no duty is assigned to faith because souls gaze incessantly on faith's Everlasting Object. One by one, each in his turn, we shall follow him; and hereafter, perhaps, in that unending world, some of us will bless the Giver of all good gifts for His servant's work in showing us, during this our earthly pilgrimage, that "they who have not seen, and yet have believed," have learnt what is due to a true estimate of the powers of man's reason, as well as to the authority of the Voice of God.

SERMON II.

THE REVELATION TO ST. THOMAS.

(FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT: FEAST OF ST. THOMAS.)

ST. JOHN XIV. 5, 6.

Thomas saith unto Him, Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.

ST. THOMAS is chiefly remembered for the part he played in that memorable scene after the Resurrection of our Lord, which is described in to-day's Gospel. His unbelief, or rather his deliberate suspension of assent to the truth which was before him, except upon certain narrow conditions which he laid down, led to a verification of our Lord's Resurrection, and to a confession of His true Divinity, in some respects more emphatic than any other in the Gospels. And in the same way the Apostle's question in the passage before us was followed by a most memorable result. St. Thomas seems to have been, by the temper of his mind, hesitating, reserved, critical; disposed to see difficulties, to ask for explanations, to require more proof when others acquiesced. It will be in your recollection that our Lord had begun His last discourse in the supper-room by dwelling on His approaching departure from the world. The disciples were not to be troubled at it. If they believed in God, they would

also believe in Jesus Christ; and if He is leaving them, He tells them it was that He might prepare a place for them among the many mansions of the Father's House. Then He would return; whether by some great spiritual visitation, or in some catastrophe like the destruction of Jerusalem, or in that world-embracing event of which it was an anticipatory shadow. He would come again and receive them to Himself, that where He was they might be also. Meanwhile, the disciples knew at least the direction in which He was moving; and this knowledge would reassure their troubled hearts. "Whither I go"—these were His exact words—"whither I go, ye know the way."[a]

It is at this point that St. Thomas bursts in somewhat abruptly with his objection: "Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way?" The language of our Lord about the purpose of His departure, which says so much to us, which brings our Father's House and its many mansions so vividly before us, had left no strong or distinct impression on the minds of men who were still on the threshold of faith, and to whom spiritual things were new. Our Lord seemed to be speaking of a work, while they were thinking of a place. And if they did not know to what place He was going, how could they know the way to it? In natural things this reasoning is cogent. Thomas did but express the obvious and superficial criticism upon a statement which could only be understood in the light of a higher truth than he had yet grasped.

Probably a human teacher would have answered St. Thomas somewhat as follows: "I have already told you enough about the purpose of my departure to enable you to understand the direction which I must take. Your

[a] Cf. St. John xiv. 4. The second καὶ and οἴδατε in the Received Text represent an attempt to explain this condensed saying, by expanding it.

knowledge of the way does not depend so entirely as you may think upon an exact idea of the goal to which I am moving. You may well wait for further knowledge, since you know enough for present purposes, whether of consolation or of duty."

This would have been an answer sufficient in itself, and, as we may perhaps think, wholesome for a person in St. Thomas's state of mind. But our Lord, as was often His manner, especially as He is reported by the fourth Evangelist, did not answer the question; or, at least, He did not answer it directly. He seems to have looked at it, not as a question to be answered, but as affording an occasion for proclaiming a wider, grander, more comprehensive truth than was needed in order to answer it. The question is left on one side; it is only answered incidentally. Our Lord, before speaking again, would seem to have moved beyond the narrower issue which the question raises into a wider and sublimer field of contemplation, which is the subject of His next utterance. Jesus saith unto him, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." We may well be grateful to St. Thomas for eliciting this splendid revelation; and we shall not be wanting to the claims of his festival if we proceed to consider it somewhat in detail.

I.

Our Lord begins, "I am the Way."

He is, of course, thinking of His own words, "Whither I go, ye know the way;" and of St. Thomas's question, "How can we know the way?" But while repeating the word "way," He gives it a new setting. Instead of saying, "I will show you the way," He says, "I am the Way." As we think over His words, we feel that, in this

new and higher association, the word has grown sensibly in scope and meaning.

The employment of the figure of a way, or path, to describe the successive phases of human thought or conduct, the invisible track along which the spirit of man moves between birth and death, was more natural to the ancient world than it is to the modern. Before the Roman civilization, there were scarcely any carefully constructed public roads. Men journeyed from place to place as best they might, without the guidance of a settled track; they watched the heavens, or they noted any traces they could of former travellers across the Eastern deserts, or through the forests and mountains of the West. In those early days, and for long after, the metaphor was too natural and too welcome not to be generally employed to describe any system of moral or religious guidance. Thus, to go no further, the later Stoics, and some Chinese mystics, and the Mohammedan Corân, each recommend a "way;" although, in the last instance, the word is undoubtedly borrowed from the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. In the religious language of the Jews, it meant the path which a soul should follow in order to reach the true goal of its destiny; in order to be conformed to the Will of God. Thus the Psalmist speaks of "the way of the righteous,"[a] "the right way,"[b] "the way of God's precepts,"[c] "the way of God's commandments,"[d] "the way of God's statutes,"[e] "the way of truth,"[f] "the way wherein I should walk,"[g] "the perfect way;"[h] and the Book of Proverbs of "the way of life;"[i] and Isaiah of "the way of the just,"[j] "the way of holiness,"[k] "the way of peace;"[l] and Jeremiah of "the good way,"[m] "the one

[a] Ps. i. 7. [b] *Ib.* ii. 12. [c] *Ib.* cxix. 27. [d] *Ib.* 32. [e] *Ib.* 33.
[f] *Ib.* 30. [g] *Ib.* cxliii. 8. [h] *Ib.* ci. 2. [i] Prov. vi. 23. [j] Isa. xxvi. 7.
[k] *Ib.* xxxv. 8. [l] *Ib.* lix. 8. [m] Jer. vi. 16.

way,"[a] "the way to Zion,"[b] "the way which God would show;"[c] and Amos of "the way of the meek;"[d] and Malachi of "the way that the forerunner should prepare;"[e] and Zacharias of "the way of peace," into which "the Day-star from on high" would "guide our feet."[f]

But of all the many passages in which the word occurs, perhaps the most vivid is that which closes the First Lesson for this afternoon's[g] service, in which Isaiah, looking through and beyond historical events in a nearer future, predicts the faith and discipline of the Christian Church as a rule of life for redeemed humanity:—

"And an highway shall be there,
And a way,
And it shall be called
The way of holiness;
The unclean shall not pass over it;
But it shall be for those:
The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.
No lion shall be there,
Nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon,
It shall not be found there;
But the redeemed shall walk there:
And the ransomed of the Lord shall return,
And come to Zion with songs,
And everlasting joy shall be upon their heads:
They shall obtain joy and gladness,
And sorrow and sighing shall flee away."[h]

Thus the expression, "the way," had a fixed and well-understood religious meaning. It meant a path uniting two worlds, the seen with the unseen, earth with Heaven; traversing regions through which, without such guidance, the thought and heart of man could not safely penetrate; and having definite characteristics of its own. The figure at once suggested the associations of righteous-

[a] Jer. xxxii. 39. [b] *Ib.* l. 5. [c] *Ib.* xlii. 3.
[d] Amos ii. 7. [e] Mal. iii. 1. [f] St. Luke i. 79.
[g] The Festival of St. Thomas. [h] Isa. xxxv. 8–10.

ness, peace, God's commands, God's Will, and the like; so that when "the way" was spoken of every one knew what it meant. And thus we find that, after the Day of Pentecost, when the Christian Church and Religion were abroad in the world, the name was constantly applied to Christianity, the Apostolic faith and life. "I persecuted this way unto the death,"[a] says St. Paul, when describing his unconverted life; of his later years he professes that "after the way that the Jews call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers."[b] When Aquila and Priscilla completed the Christian education of Apollos, they are said to have "expounded to him the way of God more perfectly."[c] The anti-Christian demonstrations in the amphitheatre at Ephesus are described as "no small stir about that way."[d] When Felix's unwillingness to hear St. Paul's more direct appeal to his conscience is accounted for, we are told that he already knew a great deal about the Christian Creed; he "had a more perfect knowledge of that way."[e]

"The way," then, in our Lord's mouth, meant that disposition of the mind and heart and will of man by which man attains to the true end of his being. St. Thomas was right in thinking that "way" and "end" are, in some sense, correlative terms; that the one implies the other; that some notion of the end before us, although not necessarily a local one, is necessary to our knowing the way. What is the end to which our Lord proclaims Himself the Way?

If eighteen centuries ago we could have walked up and down the streets of Rome, the great capital of the world, and have cross-questioned the human beings whom we should have met respecting the objects for which

[a] Acts xxii. 4. [b] *Ib.* xxiv. 14. [c] *Ib.* xviii. 26.
[d] *Ib.* xix. 23. [e] *Ib.* xxiv. 22.

they were spending thought, heart, resolution, life itself; what would have been the answer? We know only too well from their own literature. They would have named power, influence, knowledge, reputation, fortune, success, enjoyment. For these things they prayed to deities who were the reflections of their own passions. About these things they talked and wrote and quarrelled, without a suspicion that they were not doing the best they could with life. And towards each of these ends there was many a way; tortuous, slippery, rough, facile, as the case might be. And if any had whispered that there was something better to be done with life; that no end which perishes with death can be adequate unless we can be sure that all ends at death; that to make the best of life in this lower and material sense, is to fall below the ideal which man's own heart and conscience, when cross-questioned, would suggest;—those old Romans would have gently shrugged their shoulders, and smiled at the simple enthusiasm which could really imperil present, substantial, and visible comforts for an object so transcendental, so uncertain, so fugitive.

But let us, in passing, ask ourselves, Is it certain that the objects which they thus held to be worthy ends of life were wholly unlike those of many a modern Londoner? The phrases in which the estimate might be stated would doubtless differ. But would not the pith and substance of the estimate be much the same?

Now, this general conception of the object of life is again and again condemned by our Lord Jesus Christ. According to Him, this world is to be used simply with a view to the next; it is to be renounced, if need be, altogether for the sake of the next. He nowhere promises to His followers wealth, or reputation, or social power, or present amusement. He blesses those who give up father

and mother, and wife and children, for His sake.[a] He at least glances at the pagan conceptions of a present, material object and end of thought and effort when He says, "He that loveth His life shall lose it."[b]

The end which our Lord had in view, and to which He is "the Way," is described sometimes, as in the context of this passage, as a "coming to the Father;" sometimes as a "finding" or "entering" "the Kingdom of Heaven,"[c] or "the Kingdom of God."[d] This Kingdom, as we know, was to begin in time; it was to reach on into eternity. It was to be founded on earth, and was to be expanded, perfected, and consolidated in Heaven. It was to be set up in the individual soul, but it was also to be the temper and rule of a great society; spread throughout the invisible as well as the visible world. It was to be the reign of the One Perfect Being; the control of human life, in its various relations, by that moral law which is, in its essence, His Nature; the conquest and mortification of desire in all its lower and selfish forms; the subdual of concupiscence, of pride, of self-assertion; the establishment of love between man and man as a controlling principle of intercourse; the reign of harmony alike in this great confederation of souls and in each of its constituent members; of a harmony to be achieved when human minds should possess and obey the truth, and human affections be centred on the Eternal Beauty, and human wills freely submitted to the Perfect and Eternal Law.

This is the ideal which our Lord set before men as their true end. Even in its degradation and weakness the human conscience could not but acknowledge its fascination. But how was such an end to be reached? That question is answered by the saying, "I am the Way."

[a] St. Matt. xix. 29. [b] St. John xii. 25.
[c] St. Matt. v. 20; vii. 21; xiii. 45, 46. [d] St. Luke iv. 43; St. John iii. 5.

As though He would say, "The road you seek, that it may bring you to the Father and to the Kingdom, is not like the milky way traced by imagination across the material heavens; since in the moral and spiritual world space has no existence. I am the Way. In My life and teaching you already see the road which leads to the Father and the Kingdom. The Father may be reached and the Kingdom entered even here. My Human Nature is consecrated as a new and living way [a] into the Presence-chamber of the Holiest; and no other way than this is open to you. No man cometh to the Father but by Me. I am the Way."

II.

But our Lord goes further. He says, "I am the Truth."

Let us observe what He does not say. He does not say, "I teach the truth." All teachers would at least wish to say that. He does not say, "I am the greatest teacher of truth that the world has seen." That would have been true; but it would have fallen short, almost infinitely short, of the reality. He does say, "I am the Truth." We cannot overrate the significance of this saying. It altogether does away, in our Lord's case, with the distinction which we find in the case of all others who have taught mankind, between the teacher and his message. Look at those instructors of our modern world—Bacon, Newton, Butler; their message is entirely independent of themselves. If we knew nothing whatever about these men, the value of their several contributions to the knowledge and thought of the world would be quite unaffected by our ignorance. What they tell us

[a] Heb. x. 20.

has an independent value of its own. This value lasts when the lips that have taught it have mouldered into dust; when the true outline of their lives is known perhaps only to a few students. In like manner, the teaching of a Prophet or an Apostle has a value distinct from the person of its author; and some of the most beautiful things in Christendom are of uncertain authorship. The controversies about the authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews, or of the Athanasian Creed, or of the *Imitation of Christ*, do not affect our estimate of the intrinsic value of these compositions.

It is otherwise with our Lord. His message is bound up indissolubly with His Person; nay, He is His own Message to the world. His language is intolerable or meaningless unless there exists such a Person as He proclaims Himself to be, and unless He is that Person. In short, Christ is Christianity. Therefore He could say, not only "I teach the Truth," but "I am the Truth."

"I am the Truth." All that is true in human thought, all that is true in the world of fact, meets in Jesus Christ. Among other teachers truth is partially apprehended and taught, or it is mingled with error. Plato uttered many sublime things about man, about life, about virtue, together with many absurdities or worse. Moses taught, under Divine guidance, many truths about Almighty God; but, as we Christians know, they were unbalanced, incomplete truths. All the rays of truth, scattered through false or imperfect systems, meet as in a focus in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ are "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."[a] And if He sometimes teaches men only such truth as they are able to bear, He makes them feel that He has in reserve everything to teach, if only they could bear the lesson.[b]

[a] Col. ii. 3. [b] St. John xvi. 12.

Observe one consequence of this. There can be no real contradiction between the Gospel of Jesus Christ and any ascertained fact of nature, or any certain postulate or truth of thought. There may be apparent contradiction; in other words, we, with our limited faculties, or in our present circumstances, may not see how harmony is possible here or there. And there may be real and utter contradiction between the Gospel and the hypotheses, deductions, theories, which human minds have spun out from the facts of nature or from the first principles of thought. But between truth and fact, or truth and truth, there can be no real contradiction. And if we do not see how reconciliation is possible, we must believe that this does not show that reconciliation is impossible; we must be patient, and light will surely come.

"I am the Truth." In Jesus Christ we recognize not merely relative, but absolute Truth. Remark the importance of this distinction. Much of the truth which we encounter in life is relative; relative to the age we live in, relative to the country of our birth, relative to the type of society and civilization around us, relative to the history of our own minds and characters. Nations outgrow some truths which were truths to them in the early centuries of their existence; men outgrow truths which were truths to them in childhood and boyhood. Doubtless we can verify this, each for himself, in our own experience. The books we read with most enjoyment, the minds with which we most delighted to be in contact, the thoughts, the fancies, the enthusiasms of younger days, are no longer to us what they were. We linger over them, it is true, but less on account of their intrinsic worth than from delight in the associations which they recall. But some truths there are which are as true to us now as they were then. The profound distinction between right and

wrong, the sacredness of fact in small matters as in great, the power and beauty of unselfishness,—these are as true to the man at seventy as they were to the boy at seven. And to this order of truths our Lord and Saviour—all that He teaches and all that He is—claims to belong, and does belong. "He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;"[a] not relative to a particular state of mind, but ever and for all the same. He is the Absolute Truth.

"I am the Truth." A truth in ordinary language implies two things between which it is an exact relation.

What is a true history? A history which corresponds exactly to the facts which are described. What is a true scientific statement? A statement which exactly expresses the law which governs such and such natural occurrences. What is a political truth? A tenet or doctrine in politics which does real justice to the true needs of the greatest number of human beings. When we speak of anything as true, we think of something else with which it corresponds, whether it be a fact, or a law, or an ideal. What, then, do we mean by a true religion? We mean a religion which expresses and insists on those relations between man and God which are really perfect and harmonious. And when Jesus Christ our Lord said, "I am the Truth," He meant not only that He taught us what those relations are, but that He realized them in His own Person. He is, in His twofold Nature as God and Man, the meeting-point between the Divine and the Human. He is the bridge between earth and Heaven.

Others before and since Jesus Christ have taught men much, with varying success, about God and about man; such lessons as might be learnt by continuous observation and reflection upon nature, upon conscience, upon wide experience and introspection of human character. But

[a] Heb. xiii. 8.

all such teaching, even at its best, differs vitally from that which was taught, or rather achieved, by Jesus Christ. He does not simply or mainly teach religion; He lives it. As He acts, as He suffers, in every movement of His earthly Life, we see man at perfect peace with God; we behold God absolutely controlling, inspiring, penetrating man. If we desire to know what God is in His Essential Attributes, we need but study Jesus Christ. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."[a] The knowledge of the glory of God is flashed forth from the Face of Jesus Christ.[b] Jesus Christ leaves us in no doubt as to whether God understands us, loves us, wills to save us or not. He leaves us in no doubt as to whether man may know God, love God, be one with God in the intimacy of a union which is the ideal goal of religion. It was with reference to religion that Jesus Christ said, "I am the Truth." The human soul was wearied with abstract dissertations on the awful, abstract, inaccessible Being, on the aspirations, capacities, failures of man. Jesus Christ appeared, and, for all who had eyes to see, controversy ceased. His Life proclaimed, no less clearly than His Lips, that in finding Him they had found One Who could indeed say, "I am the Truth."

III.

At last we reach the climax. Our Lord says, "I am the Life."

We have lately[c] had occasion to consider the nature of mystery. A mystery is a fact the existence of which is certain, but the compass of which is, at least partially, hidden from us. We saw that such facts, so far from

[a] St. John xiv. 9. [b] 2 Cor. iv. 6.

[c] See *Advent in St. Paul's*, vol. ii. serm. xliii.

being distinctive characteristics of revealed religion, are abundantly discoverable in the realm of Nature. Now, of such partially hidden facts or mysteries, not the least is life. As we watch ourselves, as we look out upon nature, we know that life is there. But what in itself life is, we do not know. No combination of atoms that has yet been imagined can account for its appearance; no account of its essence or origin that will bear discussion has yet been put forward by those who would ignore the presence and action of God in this His universe. We hear, indeed, of a philosophy of the unconscious; but sonorous phrases will not surmount the difficulty of explaining how, at a certain moment, a particle of dead matter could transform itself into a living cell, or how a group of these living cells could, unaided, arrive at feeling, at consciousness, at self-comprehending, self-analyzing, reflective thought. Life, indeed, is a hierarchy with many grades of dignity; it reaches from the humblest lichen on the stone beneath our feet up to the strongest and most beautiful of the intelligences around the Throne. But who shall say what in itself it is, or whence it is, unless it be the gift of One Who, as His Name implies, lives of Himself and eternally, and from Whom it derives that attribute of mystery which shrouds its true nature from our gaze?

Side by side with life, we see everywhere around us its rival, death; and if physical death has other aspects, it is closely connected, at any rate, with moral death. "By one man sin came into the world, and death by sin."[a] The world, as it exists around us, is clearly not now the best of possible worlds. It bears traces of the ravages of some destructive force; it is strewed with ruins. The agencies which are often most active, and which surround life with a thousand seductions, are really ministers of death;

[a] Rom. v. 12.

they carry death and decomposition in the folds of their robes as they move through the corridors of time. If they could speak with perfect unreserve and conscientiousness, they would say to mankind, one after another, "I am a minister of death." But Jesus Christ could say, "I am the Life." All derived life, the lowest and the highest, the life of the lichen and the life of the Archangel, meet in and are derived from Him—the Eternal Word, the Only Begotten Son, "by Whom all things were made,"[a] and Who came among us that we might have life, and might have it more abundantly.[b] For as the Father hath life in Himself, so from all eternity hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself;[c] and if God has given unto us Christians eternal life, it is because that life is in His Son.[d]

Life manifests its presence by movement and growth; and we read one aspect of the truth of the words, "I am the Life," in the general aspect of Christendom, as compared with the non-Christian world. Making all allowance for the failure of the Christian peoples to be true to the Gospel and Spirit of Christ, and, in modern times, for efforts to "break asunder the bonds" of Christian discipline, and "cast away its cords"[e] from human life, it remains true that Christian civilization has in it a power and a promise undiscoverable elsewhere; that where Christ is at work in the convictions and consciences of men, there is a hopefulness, an effort after improvement, a power to resist social decomposition, and to inaugurate true social progress, which we look for in vain where He is unknown or forgotten. It is sufficient to compare those Eastern nations in which, since the fifteenth century, Christians have formed at best a small minority of the

[a] The Nicene Creed; cf. Heb. i. 2. [b] St. John x. 10.
[c] *Ib.* v. 26. [d] 1 St. John v. 11. [e] Ps. ii. 3.

population, with the European peoples among whom Christianity has continuously been in the ascendant. The very idea of progress is a creation of Christianity, acting on the facts of social life. And those who own no allegiance to our Lord, confess that the best hopes of the world are bound up with races and nations that have been purified and invigorated by His Life.

But if our Lord is the Life of nations, it is because He is, first of all, the Life of individual souls. Christian principles act upon human society not as an influence from without, but as a leaven from within. Christianity, as a renovating power, spreads not from the multitude to the individual, but from the individual to the multitude. So it was at the first; so it is now. Whenever some few hearts and minds are thoroughly penetrated by the Life which is in Jesus Christ, the Divine contagion extends to other souls around them. There has often been a temptation to ignore this truth; to imagine a shorter and easier way to the improvement of the world through the vague influence of some social movement or enthusiasm upon large masses of men; no account being taken of man's individual relations to the Divine Redeemer. Our Lord's own example is decisive. Though He was the Saviour of the world, He dealt with single souls, as if each one for the moment absorbed His entire attention. Consider only His dealings with Nicodemus, with the woman of Samaria, with St. Mary Magdalene. "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren,"[a] is a saying which reveals His method; and it is a method not for His day only, but for all time. And this is the true meaning of the Christian Sacraments; a meaning too often lost sight of in popular but imperfect systems of Christianity. They are the revealed means of our being

[a] St. Luke xxii. 32.

brought into contact one by one with the Life that resides in the Redeemer. "As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."[a] "He that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood hath eternal life."[b]

"I am the Life." This is the crowning revelation of Himself which our Lord here makes to the soul of man. He does not merely show us a road or reveal a truth; He offers the inward vital power without which we cannot to any purpose follow the one or grasp the other. Knowledge by itself, though it be the very highest, cannot save men. We are slowly unlearning the superstition, which has had such fatal currency in this century, that to be well-informed is necessarily to be honest, industrious, pure, or even greater things than these. Alas! a man may spend his life in dissecting the very words of Christ, or the inmost convictions and feelings of Christian souls, and himself remain untouched, unimproved, dead. It is only when He Who is the Life makes the heart and will of man indeed His own, touches those secret springs at which the great issues of our existence are really determined, that the last and greatest of these words of Jesus Christ can be really understood—"I am the Life."

Let me make two remarks in conclusion. It has been said that nowhere in the Gospel does Jesus Christ say in so many words, "I am God;" and much stress is laid upon this circumstance, as if it went to show that in His own consciousness He did not claim to be Divine. If any man should be disposed to attach weight to this observation, let him consider not only the sayings of our Lord which assert His oneness[c] with the Father, and His Pre-existent Life,[d] but also and especially the import of the words before us. How should we listen to such words

[a] Gal. iii. 27. [b] St. John vi. 54. [c] *Ib.* x. 30. [d] *Ib.* viii. 58.

as these, if they were uttered by the best and wisest man whom we have ever known in life? Let us think, each of us, of such an one; perhaps of the trusted friend of our early years, whose character has seemed to develop new beauties as we have known him better, whose thoughts were better worth sharing, and whose heart was more tender, and whose will was more inflexible, as it seemed to us, than that of any other human being whom we have known. Put such a person, if you can, vividly before you, at the moments which you associate with his most striking manifestations of goodness; at some time when, perhaps, death had cast its shadow across his path, and everything was even more than commonly solemnized, purified, etherealized, by the felt nearness of the world to come. And then conceive him, if you can, as saying, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." You cannot conceive it. Your difficulty of doing so increases in the exact ratio of your belief in his goodness, his reasonableness, his humility, his power of taking a true measure of himself and of those around him. You can understand a Roman Cæsar, degraded by indulgence, degraded still more by incessant flattery, reft of all that is truest and noblest in the conscience of man by a life which has virtually imbruted him, welcoming the altars, and the incense, and the titles, and the temples, which announce his so-termed divinity to a population of slaves. But that a good man, in his right mind, should know himself to be only human, and yet should speak as does Jesus Christ in the text, is inconceivable. The best men, being only men, who have spoken and worked for God have always striven to exalt their work, their message, their commission, their Master, while they efface themselves. Do you whisper that such language as our Lord's is Oriental, and must not be judged by the standards of the

modern and European world? Well, the prophets are Orientals. Which prophet ever uses any language that distantly resembles that before us? Do they not always distinguish between themselves and their message? Do they not prostrate themselves deeper in adoration and self-abasement the more nearly they approach the Most Holy? Consider the greatest of them all, Isaiah, when he has been permitted to see the Vision of the Lord amid the seraphim, "in the year that King Uzziah died." "Woe is me!" he cries, "for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips . . . for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts."[a] Depend on it, no mere man, whether European or Oriental, whether belonging to the ancient or the modern world, could speak, if he were a good man, as does our Lord. He would have said, "I show you the way; but I try, as God enables me, to tread it with you. I proclaim to you the truth; but think, think only, of the truth and forget the teacher. I announce the gift of a new life from Heaven; but I can only point to that which comes from the Author of all good, and which I need as much as yourselves." This would have been the language of merely human goodness, and of the highest human goodness. The mere man who should tell his fellows that he himself was not only the way that they should follow, but the truth which could satisfy, and the life which could save them, would surely be guilty of a preposterous immodesty of which it would be difficult to say whether it were more blasphemous or more grotesque. No; face to face with an utterance like this—and, as you know, it by no means stands alone in the Gospels—we have to choose between taking Jesus Christ at His Word, and, with all the centuries of Christendom, adoring Him as we must adore the Being

[a] Isa. vi. 1–5.

Who Alone may thus proclaim Himself to man, or else refusing Him even that measure of respect which is due to human goodness and reasonableness; to the modesty which shrinks from untenable self-assertion, to the humility which loves to keep self in the background, to the truthfulness which will knowingly make no terms with anything that savours of exaggeration or imposture. If the human character of Jesus Christ is to be respected, we must confess that Jesus Christ is God.

And, secondly, this gracious and wonderful revelation of our Lord's real Divinity, thus elicited by His hesitating and critical disciple, should be especially welcome to us when we are looking forward to the yearly Festival of His Birth into the world. The lowly associations of Bethlehem may too easily put us off our guard, and lead us to forget Who He was That chose for His mother a Jewish maiden in humble life, and made His cradle in the stall of the ox and the ass. Let us not neglect the many duties which this blessed Festival, the yearly consecration of all that is purest and best in family life, lays on all who can discharge them; let us do what we may to enable the young and the poor and the unbefriended to feel in material as well as spiritual ways the light and warmth of the Sun of Righteousness on the morning of His rising to bless the world. Christmas gatherings, like the holly which decorates our churches and our homes, are the appropriate garniture of this most popular of festivals; but oh! let us be sure that in heart and mind we rise through and beyond these outward things to Him Who is "the Way, and the Truth, and the Life" of souls, and Who could not guide and teach and quicken us as He does, unless He were indeed the Only Begotten and the Eternal, "Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from Heaven."[a]

[a] The Nicene Creed.

SERMON III.

THE GOSPEL COVENANT.

JER. XXXI. 31–34.

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which My covenant they brake, although I was an Husband unto them, saith the Lord: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put My Law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

JERUSALEM had been taken by the Assyrian army, and the Prophet Jeremiah, with a band of other captives, had been carried in chains to Ramah, where the Assyrian general, Nebuzar-adan, had fixed his head-quarters. In those dark hours, when the Prophet was leaving a ruined home, and passing into the keeping of a pagan despot, it might well have seemed to a merely human forecast that all was lost; the independence of Israel as a people, and even the prospects of the religion of Israel. In those dark hours, God, Who so often sets His bow in the cloud of an earthly sorrow, spoke to Jeremiah in

visions which lit up his inward thoughts with the light that comes from another world. To this period of his life belong the thirtieth and thirty-first chapters of his book; and they contain a group of prophecies, written down, we are told, by Divine command, and all of them intended to relieve the gloom of the first days of Captivity by the anticipation of better times beyond. The ultimate restoration of the people to their home in Palestine;[a] the announcement of the second David;[b] the picture of Rachel weeping from her tomb at Ramah for her captive descendants, and relieved by the sure promise of their deliverance;[c] and, lastly, the proclamation of the New Covenant;[d]—these form a group of consolatory prophecies, each one of which is a perfect composition in itself, while all are directed to promote a common object. And of these the last, the prophecy of the New Covenant, is the most important.

I say it is the most important; for this prophecy is singled out to occupy a place of great prominence in the New Testament. When the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews is engaged in showing that the old Priesthood of the Law was done away at Christ's coming, because Christ was the true "Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek,"[e] Whom the Old Testament itself had led men to expect, he enforces his argument by observing that the Jewish Priesthood, and the old covenant of God with Israel, must stand or fall together, as parts of one religious whole; and that, therefore, the Jewish Priesthood must have been abolished, because the old covenant to which it belonged was, according to the Jewish Prophet, to give way to a new and a better covenant.[f] Thus it is that this passage of Jeremiah is lifted by the Apostolic writings into a prominence which is almost unique; and

[a] Jer. xxx. xxxi. 1–9. [b] *Ib.* xxx. 9. [c] *Ib.* xxxi. 15, 17.
[d] *Ib.* xxxi. 31–34. [e] Heb. v. 6, 10; vi. 20; vii. 17, 21. [f] *Ib.* viii.

it will supply us, I hope, with some useful thoughts at a season when Christians are thinking of the preparation which God made for Christianity before Christ came, and of what was said about it by the Prophets who were inspired to prepare the world for the Divine Redeemer, and for those new relations between earth and Heaven which He was to introduce.

I.

Here, then, we observe, first of all, that the Christian religion is described as a New Covenant. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel, and the house of Judah." The Gospel was, we remember, to be preached among all nations, but beginning at Jerusalem."[a] The "Israel after the flesh"[b] was to be widened into "the Israel of God,"[c] and was to embrace the world. The covenant would be new; for it had had predecessors. God is said to have made a covenant with Noah, when He promised that a judgment like the flood should not be repeated;[d] and with Abraham, when He promised Canaan to his descendants for an everlasting possession, and imposed the condition of circumcision.[e] But by the phrase, "the Old Covenant," is meant especially the covenant which God made with Israel as a people on Mount Sinai.[f] The writing termed the "Book of the Covenant" comprised the Ten Commandments, and the body of laws which are recorded in the twenty-first and two following chapters of Exodus. These were the conditions imposed by God, when He entered into covenant relations with Israel; and the solemn act by which this covenant was

[a] St. Luke xxiv. 47. [b] 1 Cor. x. 18. [c] Gal. vi. 16.
[d] Gen. ix. 8–17. [e] *Ib.* xvii. 9–14. [f] Exod. xix. 7, 8.

first inaugurated is described in the twenty-fourth chapter of Exodus. Gathered at the base of the holy mountain, before an altar resting on twelve pillars, in honour of the twelve tribes, the people waited silent and awestruck, while twelve delegates (as yet there was no Priesthood) offered such sacrifices as yet were possible, and while the Lawgiver sprinkled the blood of the victims upon the assembled multitude.[a] That ceremony had a latent meaning, unperceived at the time, which many centuries afterwards would be drawn out into the light under Apostolic direction;[b] but the solemn character of the transaction was there and then profoundly felt. And at later periods of Israel's history this covenant was again and again renewed; as by Joshua at Shechem,[c] and by King Asa at Jerusalem,[d] and by Jehoiada the Priest in the Temple,[e] and by the Priesthood and people under Hezekiah,[f] and under the auspices of Ezra[g] and Nehemiah[h] in later days still, after the great Captivity. It was renewed because it was continually broken. It was a Divine work, and yet, through man's perverseness, it was a failure. And hence the words, "Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I led them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which covenant they brake, although I was an Husband to them, saith the Lord."

"The New Covenant" is a phrase which sounds strange to the ears of Christians, who have been accustomed all their life to talk of "the New Testament." A covenant is a compact or agreement, and it implies something like equal rights between the parties to it. Monarchs make covenants or treaties with monarchs, nations with nations;

[a] Exod. xxiv. 3–8. [b] Heb. ix. 18–26. [c] Josh. xxiv. 1–25.
[d] 2 Chron. xv. 8–15. [e] 2 Kings xi. 4, 17. [f] 2 Chron. xxix. 10.
[g] Ezra x. 3. [h] Neh. ix. 38.

one private person signs a deed of agreement with another. Laban made a covenant with Jacob upon a heap of stones, to attest its reality;[a] the Gibeonites made a covenant with Israel;[b] the men of Jabesh, in their extremity, proposed, but in vain, to make a covenant with Nahash, the Ammonite king.[c]

In all such covenants a certain equality of relations between the contracting parties is assumed; each party acquires rights, each accepts liabilities. Even when, as sometimes happens, the Government of a great Power enters into a contract with a house of business or with an individual, this is because the firm or person in question is, for the purposes of the contract, on terms of equality with the negotiating Government, as having at its disposal the means of rendering some signal service, which for the moment throws all other considerations into the background. And this general equality between parties to a covenant may be further illustrated in the case of the most sacred of all human contracts—the marriage tie; that marriage tie which, by the law of God, once made, can be dissolved only by death, and in which it is the glory of the Christian law (I do not speak of all human legislation in Christian countries) to have secured to the contracting parties equal rights.

It is, then, a little startling to find this same word employed to describe a relation between the Infinite and Eternal God and the creatures of His Hand. He wants nothing, and He has everything to give; man needs everything, and can do nothing that will increase a Blessedness Which is already infinite, or enhance a Power Which as it is knows no bounds. But here are covenants between God and man in which there seems no place for reciprocity; covenants in which indulgence or endow-

[a] Gen. xxxi. 44. [b] Josh. ix. 6, 15. [c] 1 Sam. xi. 1.

ment is all on one side, and acknowledgment, or rather failure, all on the other; covenants in naming which language seems, at first sight, to forfeit its wonted meaning, and to betray us into misconceptions which bring, to say the least, confusion and bewilderment.

And yet in reality, when God speaks of making a covenant with man, He is only giving one instance of that law of condescension, of which the highest result appeared when He, the Infinite, took on Him a human Form; when He, the Eternal, entered as Man into fellowship with the children of time. God covenanting with Abraham is a prelude to God lying as an Infant in the Manger of Bethlehem, or dying for our sins on the Cross of Calvary. Certainly, when He makes a covenant with His creatures, He puts Himself and them in a new position; He makes the most of them, and the least of Himself. He gives promises or blessings of vast import; He exacts some duty, which He is pleased to treat as an equivalent. Abraham must practise and enforce circumcision;[a] Israel must keep the Law of Sinai.[b] Covenants are thus a part of the machinery of Divine condescension; by them God might seem to treat man as parents sometimes treat their children; placing them for a festive occasion in a position of supposed equality, and investing them with attributes and an importance which only belong to the years of manhood, and to a position which, from the nature of the case, is beyond their own.

A covenant, then, is a contract or compact; and the question cannot but occur to us how a covenant which God makes with His people should have come to be called a testament. For the words "covenant" and "testament" represent a single word in each of the original languages;[c] and this circumstance has been made the ground of attacks

[a] Gen. xvii. 9–14. [b] Exod. xx.–xxiii. [c] διαθήκη, בְּרִית.

upon the Bible, as if the sacred writers were playing tricks with words, or were employing an instrument of which they only half understood the value. Some of my hearers will have met with these objections, and while I notice them, I must bespeak for a few minutes the patience and charity of those who happily have not.

A testament, then, is a will. It has this in common with a covenant, that it is a kind of settlement. But it differs from a covenant or contract in relation to our human concerns, in that while a covenant or contract is a transaction between the living, a will or testament connects the living with the intentions of the dead. "Where a testament is," says the Apostolic writer, "there must of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth."[a]

And yet the two words "covenant" and "testament" are, as has been stated, used in our English Bible to translate a single word in the original which includes both meanings; and this twofold rendering of a single word is not merely allowable, but necessary. The Hebrew word originally means nothing more than a contract or covenant. A disposition of property made by a man in his lifetime, to have effect only after his death, was a proceeding foreign to the life of ancient Israel, and there is no word in the old Hebrew language to express it. But the Greek word, which in the New Testament stands for the Hebrew word "covenant," means, originally, a testamentary disposition or will—a sufficiently familiar idea to the Greek world. The Greek-speaking Jews of Alexandria, who, some two hundred years and more before our Lord, turned the Old Testament bit by bit into Greek, as it was wanted for use in their synagogues, and then made

[a] Heb. ix. 16, 17.

out of these fragments the great version which we call the Septuagint, used the Greek word for "will" to translate the Hebrew word "covenant," because they observed that the old covenants of God with the patriarchs and with Israel did involve actual bequests, such as the possession of Canaan, which could only be inherited in a distant future. Thus the Hebrew word, meaning a contract, was strained by its actual use to mean a bequest; and the Greek word, meaning primarily, although not exclusively, a will, acquired by its associations the sense of a covenant or contract.

He, Who by His Providence controls the course of human events and the currents of human thought, does also most assuredly shape human speech so that it may do His work; and it is His doing, and not a chance irregularity, that the original word in the New Testament had thus come to mean both covenant and testament. For that which it was to describe answered to both meanings. Religion as such, and the Religion of the Gospel especially, is at once a compact with God and a bequest from God. The Gospel, I say, is a contract or covenant because its blessings are conditionally bestowed; they must be met by faith, hope, love, repentance, Christian activity in all its forms. And it is a will or testament, more obviously than was the Mosaic covenant; for it was made by our Lord when His Death was in full view. He, Who alone could use such words without folly or blasphemy, took the cup into His Blessed Hands, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to His disciples, saying, "Drink ye all of this: for this is My Blood of the New Testament, Which is being poured out for you and for many for the remission of sins."[a] And yet this very testament is so conditioned as to be a covenant too; and

[a] St. Matt. xxvi. 27, 28.

the solemn words to which I have just referred were but an echo of the saying in the Prophet, "Behold, I make a New Covenant."

II.

Of this New Covenant in the Gospel, there were, according to Jeremiah, to be three characteristics. We cannot suppose that he is giving us an exhaustive description: he selects these three points because they form a vivid and easily understood contrast between the New Covenant and the Old, between Christianity and Judaism.

a. First, then, in those who have a real part in the New Covenant, the Law of God was not to be simply or chiefly an outward rule; it was to be an inward principle. The ordinary Israelite thought of the Divine Law as something outside him. True, he had to conform to it, to submit to it, to obey it, as he could; and, as St. Paul says, he made his boast[a] in it, since he felt that it gave him national and religious prestige to belong to forefathers who had received it from Heaven. But he shrank from its exacting requirements, from its stern warnings; he kept it, in his imagination, reverently at a distance. It was, he rejoiced to proclaim, traced by the Finger of God; but it was laid up in the Sacred Ark, or, in later ages, it was hidden—so said accepted traditions—in some mysterious cave ever since the Chaldean capture of the Temple. He was proud of it as the chief glory of a Religion whose requirements he scarcely attempted to fulfil. Of course, there were exceptions in ancient Israel; such as that most spiritual of the later poets, who, in the dark night of the Captivity, poured forth from his fervid soul the hundred and nineteenth Psalm; one long cele-

[a] Rom. ii. 23.

bration of the beauty and power of the Divine Law, as manifested in the life and as ruling the affections of a sincere Israelite. But, as a rule, it was prized and disobeyed; like some great family name which is valued as a social passport, while its attendant obligations to lead a noble life are generally disregarded.

With the New Covenant it was to be otherwise. "This is the covenant which I will make in those days, saith the Lord: I will put My Law in their inward parts, and write it upon their hearts." The Law was to be no longer an outward rule, condemning the inward life, or even raising the spirit of rebellion. It was to be an inward principle, not running counter to the will, but shaping it, and claiming the obedience, not of its fear, but of its love, nay, of its enthusiasm. In the Christian Church, as St. Paul says, it was to be written, "not on tables of stone, but on the fleshy tables of the heart."[a] It was to present itself, not as a summons from without the soul, but as an impulse from within; not as declaring that which had to be done or foregone, but as describing that which it was already a joy to forego or to do. In short, a new Power—the Spirit of Jesus Christ, endowing Christians with the new Nature of Jesus Christ—would be within the soul, and would effect the change. "What the Law of Moses could not do, in that it was weak" through the weakness of human nature, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful humanity, and for sin, condemned sin in human nature: that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the rule of an old nature, but after that of the new.[b] The language of the hundred and nineteenth Psalm should be that of every Christian who has a true share in the New Covenant. "The Law of Thy Mouth is dearer unto me than thou-

[a] 2 Cor. iii. 3. [b] Rom. viii. 3, 4.

sands of gold and silver;"[a] "Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage;"[b] "Lord, what love have I unto Thy Law! all the day long is my study in it."[c]

β. A second note of participation in the New Covenant is the growth of the soul in the knowledge of Divine Truth. In ancient Israel, as now, men learnt what they could about God from human teachers. But the truths which they learned, though inculcated with great industry, were, in the great majority of cases, not really mastered, because there was no accompanying process of interpretation and adjustment within the soul. It was to be otherwise in the future. "And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them." In the New Covenant the Divine Teacher, without dispensing with such human instruments as were wanted, would do the most important part of His work Himself. He would make truth plain to the soul, and would enamour the soul of truth by such instruction as is beyond the reach of human argument and language, since it belongs to the world of spirit. "Ye have an unction from the Holy One," said St. John to his readers, "and ye know all things."[d] "Listen not," says St. Augustine, "too eagerly to the outward words: the Master is within."[e]

This explains a fact which has been frequently observed, namely, how often the apprehension of religious truth is found to be out of all proportion to the natural abilities, or cultivation, or acquirements of persons who really

[a] Ps. cxix. 72. [b] *Ib.* 54. [c] *Ib.* 97. [d] 1 St. John ii. 20.

[e] The whole of St. Augustine's Dialogue with Adeodatus, known as the book *De Magistro*, is an expansion of this (Op. i. 541, *sqq.*, ed. Ben.).

apprehend it. Not seldom do the very poor, who can hardly read, or not read at all, but who have made the most of such Christian instruction as God has placed in their way, show by a stray observation how high and how deep their thoughts do reach about Divine things; how eminent is their position in that invisible school of Christ, in which precedence is assigned, not to natural acuteness, but to spiritual illumination; how little, in order to perfect His work, the Unseen Teacher is dependent upon the circumstances which we value so highly.

γ. A third characteristic of the New Covenant was to be the forgiveness of sins. "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." This, although stated last, is really a precedent condition of the other two. While sins are unforgiven, there can be no writing of the moral Law upon the heart, and no illumination of the soul in the secrets of Divine Truth. For these prerogatives imply that the Christian soul is inhabited by a Divine Tenant; that Christ, the Hope of glory,[a] is in Christians, because His Spirit has made and still keeps a home for Him in the will and intellect of the regenerate soul. But this transcendent privilege is the wildest of baseless dreams if it be indeed true that the sins of the past are unforgiven. And in the average Jew they were unforgiven. The sacrifices of atonement under the Jewish Law provided a legal or external pardon; they could not put away moral guilt. "It was not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could put away sin."[b] They were only shadows of the real Atonement, which was to be offered once for all by the Perfect Representative of our race. His voluntary Death was to be the highest expression of a perfectly obedient Will; His Blood, as the symbol of

[a] Col. i. 27. [b] Heb. x. 4.

His Death and as instinct with His Life, was to have a propitiatory virtue to the end of time. "In Whom we have redemption through His Blood, even forgiveness of sins"[a]—that is the motto which Christian faith traces above the Crucified Saviour. For all the avenues of pardon here below; the one Baptism for the remission of sins; the power and commandment given to God's ministers to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins; the pardoning virtue of sorrow pressed to the heart by faith and love; the humble trembling hope whispered within that all has been blotted out;—these altogether draw their power from the Great Sacrifice on Calvary. "This is a true saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."[b] This salvation must begin with pardon, and pardon is man's first advantage secured by the New Covenant between himself and God.

Here, then, we seem to have marked out for us some considerations which may be turned to practical account. What is our share, individually, in the blessings of the New Covenant? Are we able to hope that we do in any true sense love the Law of God because it is His Law, and that, amid weakness, we obey it because obedience is welcome to us, because disobedience would be painful? Or is our Christian rule of life like the Israelite's Law of old, written, so far as we are concerned, only in our Bibles and Prayer-books, but not incorporated with the substance of our soul's life? Can we trace, as time goes on, any progressive growth in the knowledge of God; of His attributes of Power, Wisdom, and Love, of His Revealed Will, of His relations with

[a] Col. i. 14. [b] 1 Tim. i. 15.

ourselves, of His inconceivable tenderness and condescension in Redemption and Grace? Or is it the case with us that, while our understandings have been growing in strength and capacity in all other directions and for all other purposes, our knowledge of the Infinite and Eternal Being is just what it was ten, twenty, thirty years ago—if, indeed, it be not less—because no inward Teacher has grafted inwardly on our hearts the truths which have fallen on the outward ear? Are we rejoicing in the sense of God's pardoning Love in Jesus Christ, extended to us, though most unworthy, not only in Baptism, but after transgressions of God's Law in later life; or have we not yet learnt what true repentance means; the repentance without which pardon is for ever impossible? By these questions we may test the reality of our share in the New Covenant.

Here, perhaps, brethren, some of you will say that you like to think of yourselves as living under the New Testament, and that you conceive of the New Testament as containing a legacy of unstinted benevolence to which no conditions whatever are attached. Doubtless the Gospel, as a testament or will, does ensure to the successive generations of Christendom a splendid patrimony; under its terms we inherit the infinite merits of the Redeemer, the sanctifying power of the Spirit, the grace and virtue of the Sacraments, the instruction and encouragement of the Holy Scriptures, ay, and a perpetual right of access in prayer "into the Holiest by the Blood of Jesus, through a new and living way, which He has consecrated,"[a] and which is open to faith while time shall last. Doubtless the Gospel is a will, and we Christians are the legatees in whose favour it is made. But it is also a will to which conditions are attached; and these

[a] Heb. x. 19, 20.

conditions make it practically a contract, a covenant. Do not let us deceive ourselves. Those exhilarating promises of a Law written on the heart, of the communication of truth by an Invisible Teacher, of the plenary forgiveness of sins, imply accompanying engagements and duties. They imply faith, hope, love; they imply a straightforward desire to make the best of religious opportunities. They imply renunciation of our spiritual enemies, belief in the Articles of the Christian Faith, and obedience to God's Holy Will and Commandments;[a] the three terms of the great engagement which was promised and vowed in our names when we first entered into covenant with Christ. We cannot do ill in sifting this matter, each for himself, at this sacred season.

Religion, it has been finely said, rests on a sense of gratitude balanced by a sense of responsibility. By all means let us hail in the New Testament mercies which should rouse our deepest gratitude. But let us not forget that the New Testament is also the New Covenant. Let us think much of the responsibilities which that word implies. Let us bear in mind that a Covenant implies not only rights but duties; and let us shape our lives by this conviction, "so much the more, as we see the day approaching."[b]

[a] See the *Church Catechism.*

[b] Heb. x. 25.

SERMON IV.

THE FAME OF EPHRATAH.

(FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

Ps. CXXXII. 6.

Lo, we heard of the same at Ephratah, and found it in the wood.

THE hundred and thirty-second is the last of the six Proper Psalms which the Church uses on Christmas Day; and the reason for its selection is probably to be found in the verse before us, "Lo, we heard of the same at Ephratah." Ephratah, or, as it is sometimes written, Ephrath, is an old title of Bethlehem. We are told in Genesis that "Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem."[a] In their address to Boaz on his marriage to Ruth, the elders of the place bade him "do worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem;"[b] and in his great prophecy of the Nativity the Prophet Micah combines the two names into one: "But thou, Bethlehem-Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be Ruler in Israel."[c]

Ephratah, then, is certainly Bethlehem; and as Bethlehem was the birthplace of our Lord and Saviour, and is not referred to by name in any other Psalm, this may

[a] Gen. xxxv. 19. [b] Ruth iv. 11. [c] Micah v. 2.

have appeared a sufficient reason for the use of this Psalm in the proper service for Christmas Day. But here the question arises, Who or what was it that was heard of at Ephratah, and found in the fields of the wood? The context makes clear what the answer to this question must be. It was the ark of the covenant.

It seems likely that this Psalm, as it now stands, was compiled at some time after the Exile, but compiled out of inspired fragments which had been composed at different periods of Jewish history. Of these fragments the earliest probably belongs to the age of David; and of this fragment the text is a part. The later compiler recalls before God, in David's words, David's vow, that he would not rest until he had provided a sanctuary for the homeless ark.

> "I will not come into the tabernacle of mine house,
> Nor climb up into my bed;
> I will not suffer mine eyes to sleep,
> Nor mine eyelids to slumber,
> Neither the temples of my head to take any rest,
> Until I find out a place for the Lord,
> An habitation for the mighty God of Jacob." [a]

And then he recalls the words of the people at the time—

> "Lo! we heard of it [that is, the ark] at Ephratah;
> We found it in the fields of the wood [that is, at Kirjath-jearim].
> We will go into His tabernacle,
> And fall low on our knees before His footstool."

The period to which these words belong is that which elapsed between the return of the ark from its seven months' captivity among the Philistines, and its triumphal and solemn conveyance by David to Mount Zion. Is there anything in the Bible history to show that during this time, or any time, the ark was at Ephratah, or Beth-

[a] Ps. cxxxii. 3–5.

lehem? Certainly the ark was still a wanderer, at a distance from that tabernacle, of which it was the most important feature. When the Philistines, terror-stricken at the calamities which its presence had brought upon them,[a] restored it to Israel, it was for many years kept among different Levitical families, living on the western portion of Judah, until David, at a great national festival, conducted it to Jerusalem.[b] But, so far as we know, the ark never, in the course of its wanderings, went so far to the south as Bethlehem; it would not naturally have gone thither, between its sojourn in the house of Aminadab at Kirjath-jearim, and its sojourn in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. Its movements were confined to a district away to the north-west of Bethlehem; and the difficulty of its being heard of at Bethlehem is not removed by the suggestion that the speakers in the Psalm were themselves at Bethlehem when they heard of the ark, but that the ark itself was not thought of as being there. For the plain meaning of the language is, not that the ark was heard of by persons at Bethlehem, but that it was heard of as being itself at Bethlehem. Either, therefore, some incident in the progress of the ark is here referred to, to which no reference or clue is given us in the historical books of the Old Testament, and for which they appear to leave no room; or, more probably, we have before us a prophetic impulse or inspiration, which, as is the manner of prophecy, loses sight for the moment of its immediate object as a greater object, still more future, and of which the former is a type or anticipation, comes into view. Of this we have a striking example in our Lord's prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem merging in that of the end of the world, in the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew; and it is at

[a] 1 Sam. v.–vi. 1–18. [b] 2 Sam. vi. 1–18.

least probable that in the case before us attention is drawn to Bethlehem as the scene on which would be displayed, in a later age, a Presence to Which the ark pointed onwards, and Which has made the little Jewish village famous throughout all time.

I.

Here let us ask ourselves what the ark was. It was an oblong chest or box, made out of shittim wood, a variety of the acacia. It measured rather more than four feet in length, and two in breadth and height. This chest was covered with plates of gold, within and without; while upon its upper lid was the mercy-seat, the throne of the Divine Presence in the midst of Israel. On either side of this were figures of the cherubim; figures, be it observed, that were made, notwithstanding the second commandment, by Divine command.[a]

Now, although the ark was the most sacred object in the tabernacle, it was not, if the expression may be allowed, an original feature in the religion of Israel. Like other things, it was borrowed from Egypt. To this day may be seen, on the walls of ancient temples in Egypt, bas-reliefs of processions in which Egyptian priests are carrying sacred chests, and of some of these representations the date is several centuries earlier than the date of Moses. There can be no reasonable doubt that the ark of the covenant in Israel was an adaptation of this feature of the old religion of Egypt to the worship of the one true God; and there is no reason why such a fact as this should be regarded as an obstacle to faith. Inspiration does not always take the form of original suggestion; it is not unfrequently guidance in selection;

[a] Exod. xxv. 18.

it teaches how to choose out of a mixed mass of materials those elements which will illustrate or will harmoniously combine with the true religion. In this way the authors of the Books of Kings and Chronicles were guided to incorporate with their works certain documents which already existed, while they left others on one side: and St. Paul was taught to retain and to use certain arguments which he had learnt in the Rabbinical schools at Jerusalem, while he deliberately neglected others; and to sanction certain features of the thought and language of ancient Greece, while ignoring or condemning the rest. The position that all the thought, all the practices, all the usages of the old heathen religions were equally bad, was never bluntly stated until some Puritan divines stated it in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: Tertullian, perhaps, comes near doing so, in the third. The Puritan divines were quarrelling with the Church about usages which she still retained in common with certain heathen religions, such, for instance, as the use of the surplice; but in that day men did not know enough to understand how this objection of theirs, if it was an objection, told against the Bible. We know now that all heathen systems, instead of being wholly false, are in different proportions conglomerates of falsehood and truth, and so differ from the Christian Revelation, which is wholly true, and from pure atheism, which is wholly false. Certainly, when Moses was guided to adapt to the worship of the true God the Egyptian symbol of a consecrated chest or ark, he was obeying one of the most common forms of inspiration.

II.

In the days to which the Psalmist's words refer, the ark provided satisfaction for certain instincts of the

human soul, which any powerful and lasting religion must satisfy in some way or other. The first demand of a soul is that a religion shall be true; and the second, that it shall provide some demonstrably efficient means of communion with Him Who is the Object of religion—the Infinite and Eternal God. But besides these demands there are three others of a subordinate kind. The idea of God kindles in the soul the sense of beauty; and beauty that meets the eye suggests the immaterial beauty of the Invisible King. No religion can afford permanently to neglect this instinct of the human soul; there is no revealed connection between religious truth or real spirituality on the one hand, and slovenliness or deformity on the other. Then the Eternity of God kindles in the soul a reverence for antiquity, as the best sort of approach that anything on earth can make to God's eternal years; and thus all powerful and lasting religions have sought the sanction of antiquity. Christianity did so in its earliest days, by linking itself on to the Scriptures of Judaism; Christ Himself proclaimed, "I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil"[a] them. And, once more, the Divine Being, far removed as He is from the reach of human sense, suggests to man that any religion that reflects His Mind must have attaching to it an element of mystery. A religion which should be, as people say, plain and intelligible from beginning to end, presenting no difficulties, suggesting no unanswered questions to a finite understanding, might be respectable as the work of a human manufacturer of religious theories. But it would carry on its front the proclamation and certificate of falsehood, if it should lay claim to Divine authority, or undertake to provide satisfaction for the soul of man.

Now, in these three respects the ark largely satisfied

[a] St. Matt. v. 17.

the religious needs of Israel. It was, to begin with, a beautiful object; beautiful in itself, and especially with relation to the art of that day. And, in David's time, it was already ancient: it had shared the early and anxious fortunes of Israel in the desert; while during its sojourn in Shiloh, it had gathered round it a large store of religious and national associations. Once more, there was an element of mystery that surrounded it: it was shrouded from the popular sight by prescribed coverings; its contents, and the Presence Which accompanied it, were suggestive of much beyond. The mystery which attached especially to the mercy-seat impressed the heart of Israel with a mingled feeling of love and fear. And a heavy penalty was paid by any who, like Uzzah, ventured to break through the awful reverence which should have protected it from profane intrusion or handling.[a]

But here it is necessary to go more into detail, and, by way of doing so, we may observe that the ark of the covenant, of this shape, these dimensions, this historical origin—beautiful, ancient, mysterious—was in two respects especially remarkable.

It was remarkable, first of all, on account of its contents. These were, in the early ages of Israel, threefold. First of all there were the tables of the Law, written by the Finger of God.[b] Next, as we are told in the Epistle to the Hebrews, there was Aaron's rod that budded, and the pot of manna.[c] These had certainly been ordered to be kept before the testimony,[d] or tables of the Law; but it would seem that in Solomon's days they had disappeared, as at his dedication of the Temple we are expressly told there was nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone.[e]

Each of these relics reminded Israel of a serious truth.

[a] 2 Sam. vi. 6, 7. [b] Exod. xxv. 16, 21; Deut. x. 1–5. [c] Heb. ix. 4.
[d] Numb. xvii. 10; Exod. xvi. 34. [e] 1 Kings viii. 9.

Aaron's rod was the symbol of Israel's communion with God in prayer and sacrifice, since it witnessed to the Divine authority of the Jewish priesthood. The pot of manna was the witness of Israel's dependence upon God for material as well as spiritual blessings; it recalled the Divine bounty which had saved Israel from famine in the desert. But the most important, as well as the most permanent of the contents of the ark, was the tables of the Law, before which the rod and the manna were "laid up." The preservation of these tables in the ark not only implied that the precepts inscribed on them were obligatory on the conscience of Israel; it was a vivid and striking representation of the fact that the Moral Law was the most sacred thing in Israel, as being a statement in human speech not only of the Will but of the Nature of God. The tables of the Law were thus a symbol of the essential Holiness of God; of that attribute which the high intelligences of heaven incessantly adore with their "Holy, Holy, Holy!"[a]

Secondly, the ark was distinguished by the Presence Which rested on it. Not only was it the support of the mercy-seat, while it enclosed the letter of the covenant, on the observance of which God's favour depended. But this symbolical meaning of the ark and its cover was emphasized by an Appearance above it, between the cherubim, manifesting so much of the beauty and glory of God as it was possible for His creatures to witness in this mortal state. A light of extraordinary brightness appeared on particular occasions; but for the most part it was shrouded in a cloud which alone was visible. This the later Jews called the Shekinah, meaning that which rested or dwelt[b] here below, and implying that it belonged originally to a higher sphere. This peculiar manifestation of the Divine

[a] Isa. vi. 3. [b] From שכן.

Presence accompanied the Israelites from Egypt at the Exodus, added not a little to the confusion of the Egyptians when in pursuit of them, and finally took possession of the tabernacle at its completion,[a] just as in after years, at the dedication of Solomon's Temple, "the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the Glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord."[b] While there is no reason for thinking that, either in the tabernacle or the first temple, the cloud was ever withdrawn from its place between the cherubim, it is clear that the overpowering light which it concealed was only made visible on rare occasions. Even when Moses "heard the voice of One speaking unto him from off the mercy-seat that was upon the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubims,"[c] the radiance of the Shekinah does not seem to have appeared. But it flashed forth from the cloud before the falling of the manna,[d] and at the first sacrifices offered by Aaron after his consecration,[e] or sometimes in token of the Divine displeasure, as when the people prepared to stone Joshua and Caleb on their return from their visit to the Promised Land,[f] or when Korah and his fellow-rebels gathered themselves together against the door of the tabernacle of the congregation,[g] or when the people murmured against Moses and Aaron in Kadesh.[h] On these occasions the "glory," that is the brilliant light which was concealed by the cloud, is said to have become visible, either to the whole population, or to those immediately around or within the tabernacle.

Those who believe that the Lord of the moral world is also the Author and Ruler of the natural world, will

[a] Exod. xiv. 24; xl. 34, 35. [b] 1 Kings viii. 10, 11. [c] Numb. vii. 89.
[d] Exod. xvi. 10. [e] Lev. ix. 23. [f] Numb. xiv. 10.
[g] *Ib.* xvi. 19. [h] *Ib.* xx. 6.

scarcely dispute His right thus to employ the resources of nature in the interests of His moral government. We cannot read the Psalms without perceiving the influence on devout minds of this Sacred Presence in the midst of Israel. It explains the cry of agony in the Chaldean invasion: "Show Thyself, Thou that sittest upon the cherubims."[a] It gave point to David's reflection on the power of prayer in days when God spake to His servants out of the cloudy pillar.[b] It prompted the shout of triumph when the sons of Kohath lifted the sacred ark, as it went forward in procession: "Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered: let them also that hate Him flee before Him."[c] It enables us to understand the poet of a later age, when he describes that supreme disaster which broke the heart of the old high priest.[d] At the capture of the ark God delivered their Power into captivity, and their Beauty into the enemies' hand.[e] It shows us the peculiar malignity of the idolatry of which the Israelites had been guilty at the foot of Sinai, when they turned their "Glory"—of Whose supersensuous beauty they might have learnt somewhat from the Shekinah—into the similitude of a calf that eateth hay.[f] And so in the Psalm before us; no sooner is the ark referred to, than the Psalmist adds, "We will go into His tabernacle, and fall low on our knees before His footstool," that is, before the ark, which was beneath the Sacred Presence. "Arise," he continues, "O Lord, into Thy resting-place; Thou, and the ark of Thy strength."[g]

Indeed, the Shekinah which rested on the mercy-seat will alone explain the peculiar fervour of the devotional language about the tabernacle, or the temple, which so

[a] Ps. lxxx. 1. [b] *Ib.* xcix. 7. [c] *Ib.* lxviii. 1.
[d] 1 Sam. iv. 17, 18. [e] Ps. lxxviii. 62.
[f] *Ib.* cvi. 20. [g] *Ib.* cxxxii. 7, 8.

often meets us in the Psalter. The Shekinah made the sense of the Presence of God, His Holiness, His Justice, His Mercy, vivid to the mind of the pious Israelite. It made the Israelite fear to approach his Lord and Master in a condition of conscious disobedience or moral pollution.

"Lord, who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle,
Or who shall rest upon Thy holy hill?
Even he, that leadeth an uncorrupt life,
And doeth the thing that is right,
And speaketh the truth from his heart.
He that hath used no deceit in his tongue,
Nor done evil unto his neighbour,
And hath not slandered his neighbour.
He that setteth not by himself,
But is lowly in his own eyes,
And maketh much of them that fear the Lord.
He that sweareth unto his neighbour,
And disappointeth him not, though it were to his own hindrance.
He that hath not given his money upon usury,
Nor taken reward against the innocent.
Whoso doeth these things shall never fall." [a]

And yet, while the Presence on the ark thus awed the Israelite into moral disobedience, it attracted him with a fascination which he felt most keenly when separated from it. Thus David—

"One thing have I desired of the Lord, which I will require,
Even that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,
To behold the fair beauty of the Lord, and to visit His temple." [b]

So a later Psalmist in temporary exile—

"Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks,
So longeth my soul after Thee, O God.
My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God:
When shall I come to appear before the Presence of God?" [c]

[a] Ps. xv. [b] *Ib.* xxvii. 4. [c] *Ib.* xlii. 1, 2.

So another Psalmist, at a distance from Jerusalem, but certainly before the Babylonish captivity—

"O how amiable are Thy dwellings, Thou Lord of hosts!
My soul hath a desire and longing to enter into the courts of the Lord:
My heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God.
Yea, the sparrow hath found her an house, and the swallow a nest where she may lay her young,
Even Thy altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.
Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house;
They will be always praising Thee." [a]

III.

If we believe that the people of Israel was privileged to undergo an especial education suited to its high function as the people of Revelation, we cannot ignore the importance of the ark in the religion of Israel. As the tables within the ark reminded the Israelite of the supreme importance of moral truth, so the cloud on the mercy-seat above the ark reminded him of a particular mode of the Presence of God Which was vouchsafed to Israel. Year after year, generation after generation, Israel was accustomed to associate the Presence of Him, Whom "the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain," [b] with a particular spot, a particular outward form, a particular occasional manifestation. Would not this have been leading men's thoughts in an opposite direction to that of the absolute Spirituality and Immateriality of God, unless God had purposed to manifest Himself to man after a manner for which the ark and the Shekinah would be a preparation? In other words, does not this feature of the religion of Israel only become intelligible when we place it in the light of the Incarnation?

It is clear that a great Apostle was of this mind.

[a] Ps. lxxxiv. 1–4. [b] 1 Kings viii. 27.

When St. John tells us that "the Word was made flesh, and tabernacled[a] among us, and we beheld His glory,"[b] we cannot but observe that this language is so chosen as to recall the glory which had rested on the ark of the covenant, and the days when the tabernacle of God had a first place in the thought of Israel. And when the Voice out of the Throne proclaims in the Apocalypse, with reference to our Lord's manifestation in the flesh, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will tabernacle with them,"[c] we are led to discern in our Incarnate Saviour a sanction of and response to the yearnings which had been fostered by the Presence on the ark in the tabernacle of Israel.

Now, had the ark with its sacred contents, and the Shekinah resting on it, continued to be a leading feature of the furniture of the holy place in the Temple until our Lord's time, there might have arisen in pious minds, trained in the old religion of Israel, a rivalry between the Presence in the ark and the Presence in Jesus of Nazareth—a rivalry such as existed, as we know from the Epistle to the Hebrews, between the still continuing Jewish sacrifices and the Great Sacrifice on Calvary, with its reiterated commemorations in the Church of Christ. But, in point of fact, the distinctive glories of the ark vanished at the destruction of Solomon's Temple. In the Temple which was built after the exile, there was, it seems, no ark, no tables of the Law, no Shekinah. The outward structure of Solomon's Temple was copied even in minute details, but the prerogative symbols of Divine Presence and authority were wanting to it. Fine architecture cannot atone for de-

[a] *εσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν.* [b] St. John i. 14.

[c] Rev. xxi. 3, *Ἰδοὺ, ἡ σκηνὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ μετὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καὶ σκηνώσει μετ' αὐτῶν.*

ficiency in religious privileges; and the Jews of the days which followed the Exile were deeply sensible of their loss. So Haggai cries, in his address to Joshua and Zerubbabel, "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?"[a] In view of this deficiency Isaiah had prophesied the return of the Shekinah, in some larger sense, in the days of the Messiah: "The Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night."[b] And Ezekiel, in his vision of the return of the glory of the Lord to the Temple through the eastern gate, was assured that God would dwell in the midst of Israel for ever.[c] After the exile, God promised by Zechariah, "Lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord;"[d] and by Haggai, with reference to the new Temple, "I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts," and "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts."[e] But the new Temple did not recover the vanished distinctions of the old; and as it became more difficult to understand how the predictions of Zechariah and Haggai could be realized, the Jewish interpreters had no hesitation in saying that they would in some way become true in the days of the Messiah.

Thus we see how, first of all, the gift of the sacred ark and its accompanying prerogatives, and next its withdrawal for some six hundred years from the midst of Israel, might lead devout minds to the feet of our Lord and Saviour. The ark sanctioned and trained a religious desire for some intimate manifestation of the Presence of

[a] Hag. ii. 3. [b] Isa. iv. 5. [c] Ezek. xliii. 7.
[d] Zech. ii. 10. [e] Hag. ii. 7, 9.

God; and then the withdrawal of the ark left Israel with this desire, keener than ever, yet unsatisfied. Certainly every precious thing in ancient Israel ultimately led to Christ. Not only direct predictions which foretold His lineage, and Birth, and work, and character, and Sufferings, and Death, and Resurrection, and triumph; not only sacrificial rites, which had no efficacy or meaning apart from the immense significance which His sacrificial Death would flash back on them after the lapse of ages; not only a long line of servants of God, heroes, prophets, and saints, each exhibiting, amid imperfections, some especial form of moral excellence, while all such excellences, without any accompanying imperfections, find a place in Him. The ark both pointed to Him by its contents and by the Presence which rested on it. The rod of Aaron might suggest His Priesthood, "which was not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life;"[a] and the pot of manna befits One Who could say of Himself, "I am the Living Bread Which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this Bread, he shall live for ever: and the Bread that I will give is My Flesh, Which I will give for the life of the world."[b] But the tables of the covenant especially direct our eyes to Him Who alone perfectly fulfilled them. For all others that awful record of the Divine Will, when interpreted by the sensitive and enlightened conscience, could not but suggest a self-accusing sentence of condemnation. He could read it unmoved, and could challenge the world, "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?"[c] "I do always such things as please Him."[d] His Holy Manhood was an ark, within which the spirit as well as the letter of the Moral Law was preserved inviolate. He not merely obeyed, He lived the Law; it was intertwined with the fibres of His

[a] Heb. vii. 16. [b] St. John vi. 51. [c] *Ib.* viii. 46. [d] *Ib.* 29.

moral Life. The Jewish ark was robbed of its contents; before Solomon's time the rod and the manna had disappeared; the tables of the covenant did not outlive Nebuchadnezzar. But Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.[a] He is for ever the Priest and the Food of His people; and the Eternal Moral Law of God is for ever the law of His Life in glory.

Still more did the Presence which rested on the ark, between the cherubims, suggest that Higher Uncreated Nature which was joined to His Manhood from the first moment of His earthly Life. Often, indeed, during that Life, men saw only the unilluminated cloud; and they asked, "Is not this Joseph's Son? and is not His mother called Mary? and His brethren, are they not with us?"[b] if, indeed, they did not judge that there was no beauty in Him that they should desire Him.[c] But at times the brightness from within the cloud flashed upon them, as by the tomb of Lazarus, or on the Mount of Transfiguration, or at the door of the empty sepulchre; or when He said, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father,"[d] or "I and the Father are one thing,"[e] or "Before Abraham was, I am,"[f] or "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son,"[g] or "If any man love Me, My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him."[h]

Nor will those who believe that nothing in Holy Scripture is without its purpose, fail to observe how in His earthly Life our Lord was pleased to associate with Himself two of the accompaniments of the Presence Which rested on the ark. The overshadowing cloud on the

[a] Heb. xiii. 8. [b] St. Matt. xiii. 55, 56. [c] Isa. liii. 2.
[d] St. John xiv. 9. [e] *Ib.* x. 30, ἕν ἐσμεν. [f] *Ib.* viii. 58.
[g] St. Matt. xi. 27. [h] St. John xiv. 23.

Mount of Transfiguration,[a] and the cloud which received Him out of the sight of His disciples on the Mount of the Ascension,[b] and His prediction to the high priest, "Hereafter ye shall see the Son of Man . . . coming in the clouds of heaven,"[c] and the warning of His Apostle, "Behold, He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him,"[d]—recall one of these. And the other, the "cherubims of glory overshadowing the mercy-seat," prepares us for the angels that heralded the Nativity,[e] and for the angels that ministered at the Temptation,[f] and for the great angel of the Agony,[g] and for the angels of the Sepulchre,[h] and for the angels who met the men of Galilee after the Ascension,[i] and for Our Lord's own prediction that "the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all His holy angels with Him."[j] And it was because He thus amply restored all, and more than all, which had been lost to the second Temple, that even at His Birth He was hailed by Jewish believers, like the aged Simeon, as not merely destined to be "a Light to lighten the Gentiles," but also and especially to be "the Glory"—in the ancient sense of that word, which applied it to the Shekinah—"of His people Israel."[k]

IV.

The history of the ark, and that particular chapter of it, too, to which the text refers, suggests one more point for consideration. It was natural that the Israelites should be deeply impressed with the mysterious power attaching to the ark of the covenant, and should assume

[a] St. Matt. xvii. 5. [b] Acts i. 9. [c] St. Mark xiv. 62.
[d] Rev. i. 9. [e] St. Luke i. 26–38; ii. 9–14. [f] St. Matt. iv. 11.
[g] St. Luke xxii. 43. [h] St. Matt. xxviii. 2; St. Luke xxiv. 4.
[i] Acts i. 10, 11. [j] St. Matt. xxv. 31. [k] St. Luke ii. 32.

that it would be in all circumstances guarded against outrage. From this it was but a step to ask the question, Can we not make use of it for other purposes than that for which it was given, namely, to be a representation in the midst of Israel of the Presence, the Sanctity, the Mercy of God? Can we not, for instance, make it an engine of offensive or defensive war; so that the enemies of Israel shall quail before a Might that is more than human? It was an evil hour when, after their defeat by the Philistines at Ebenezer, the leaders of the forces of Israel bethought themselves of this expedient. "Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us to-day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh to us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies."[a] The ark came, as we know, attended by the dissolute sons of Eli;[b] the loud acclamations in the camp of Israel on its arrival carried terror for a moment into the hearts of Israel's enemies.[c] But, in the event, Israel was defeated with a greater slaughter than before; and the ark fell into the hands of the pagan conquerors.[d] The name of Ichabod, born at this sad crisis in the national history, marked the true character of the calamity: "the glory had departed from Israel."[e] And in after ages inspired Hebrew poets told how God, in His displeasure at Israel's false worships, forsook the tabernacle in Silo, even the tent which He had pitched among men; and how He delivered their power into captivity, and their beauty into the enemies' hand.[f]

The Jews committed the same mistake when they made up their minds that the promised Messiah would be a person who could be made useful for political objects

[a] 1 Sam. iv. 3. [b] *Ib.* 4. [c] *Ib.* 6–8.
[d] *Ib.* 10, 11. [e] *Ib.* 19–21. [f] Ps. lxxviii. 61, 62.

which were ardently desired by the nation. One main reason for the rejection of our Lord, in Whom the predictions of a Messiah were really satisfied, was His declaration that His kingdom was not of this world,[a] and that therefore He could not be turned to account in this way. The most pathetic instance of this illusion occurred after the destruction of Jerusalem, when the aged Rabbi Akiba, perhaps the greatest doctor of the Jewish schools, proclaimed the insurgent Barchochebas the true Messiah. At the head of 200,000 warriors, Barchochebas shook the Roman authority in Syria to its foundations; but the generals of the Emperor Hadrian reduced him to submission, after a terrific slaughter of his followers, and the Rabbi Akiba was put to a death of torture which almost obliterates the memory of his mistakes.

Are not we Christians guilty of the same fault, when we attempt to use our Creed for purposes of worldly advantage, or imagine that its public profession will screen us from danger, if we engage in doubtful courses of conduct? It is easy to carry the ark of God into fields of battle, on which neither combatant can reasonably hope to be in entire accordance with God's Will. In their different ways Oliver Cromwell and Louis XIV. carried the ark into the wars which they waged against their opponents; and the impression which they left upon men's minds was seen in the reactions which they provoked; in the popular hostility to serious religious strictness, which did much to discredit the Restoration, and in the widespread religious indifference which preceded the French Revolution.

Religious professions which are in conflict with the general conduct of those who make them, do not defeat the enemies of Religion; they betray the cause of Reli-

[a] St. John xviii. 36.

gion to its enemies. The sacred ark can never be made to fight the world's battles. God punishes the attempt to enlist Him in a cause of which He disapproves; though in the moment of disaster He knows how to guard His own honour, and how eventually to recover His throne in the hearts of men.

"Lo, we heard of the same at Ephratah." So far, then, as the ark of the covenant was concerned, in those more ancient days, it was apparently a false report, suggested perhaps by some pious peasant who was jealous for the honour of the house of David. In those ancient days the glory of Bethlehem undoubtedly paled before that of the city of the woods, Kirjath-jearim. But in view of Him in Whom the ark was to find a living counterpart, the greatest of the descendants of David—David's Son and yet David's Lord[a]—it was not a false report. Like Caiaphas's prediction,[b] it lighted unconsciously upon a deeper truth than the speakers thought of; and Ephratah had only to bide its time in order to eclipse the glories, not merely of Kirjath-jearim, but of Zion itself. There, in the outskirts of the Judæan village, in the lowly manger, scooped out, after the fashion of the country, between or beneath the layers of the limestone rock,—there His Mother laid the Divine Saviour of the world. And thither, year by year, for eighteen centuries, in thought and will if not in deed, Christians have sped to join the shepherds and the Eastern sages; and while they worship, in their Lord Incarnate, the One Man Who has kept inviolate the Eternal Moral Law of God, and in "Whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily,"[c] they offer Him the homage of their hearts and lives. Let us, too, with our tribute of penitence and love, join, if it

[a] St. Matt. xxii. 42, 43. [b] St. John xviii. 14. [c] Col. ii. 9.

may be, this great company of pilgrims belonging to so many climes and ages, in our early Communion on Christmas morning. Let us "go into His true tabernacle, and fall low on our knees before His footstool."[a] "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem-Ephratah, and see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us."[b]

[a] Ps. cxxxii. 7. [b] St. Luke ii. 15.

SERMON V.

BORN OF A WOMAN.

(CHRISTMAS DAY.)

GAL. IV. 4.

God sent forth His Son, made of a woman.

"IS it not strange," a child once asked his father, "that St. Paul should tell us that our Saviour was[a] born of a woman? Everybody that I know is born of a woman, and it is hard to see why such a thing should be mentioned as if it were remarkable."

Children, we all of us know, will sometimes take note of truths, or of sides of truth, which, for whatever reason, escape older people. Their minds are not yet worn down or stiffened by a conventional way of looking at things. The world of thought, so far as they come in contact with it, is, like the world of nature, all new ground to them; they have not yet learned to economize time and toil by concentrating attention on some few leading features, and passing over the rest as practically unimportant. Thus they make suggestions and observations which are, sometimes, worth attention, although older people should have failed to make them. Especially in the case of Christian children who have been baptized into Christ,

[a] *γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός.*

and are thus His members, religious truth presents itself with a clearness which is often forfeited by the sins or the carelessness of later life. Samuel still hears the Divine Voice when Eli may no longer hear it. Let us, then, take the question of this child, as at any rate furnishing a guide to thoughts which will not be out of place on the afternoon of Christmas Day.

I.

"Born of a woman!" Surely there is nothing remarkable in this circumstance, if we take human life as we find it. For us men to be "born of a woman" is not merely the rule, it is a rule to which there is no known exception. Since the first parent of our race, no human being has appeared upon this earth who has not owed the debt of existence to the pain and travail of a human mother. The rule holds equally with the wisest, the strongest, the saintliest. Millions there have been among the sons of men who have been also, by Divine grace, made to become sons of God; millions who have been born again, and thus have seen the Kingdom of God. But each one of these was first born of a human mother. So that we are constrained to ask why a circumstance which might have been taken for granted should be invested by the Apostle with such prominence in the case of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Surely, the real question is whether, in His case, such a circumstance could have been taken for granted. If St. Paul mentions it thus emphatically, it is because he, at least, does not make such an assumption. If, indeed, the Christ Whom St. Paul loved and served was only a son of God by grace, while by nature He was only and purely a man, then to have said that He was "born of a woman"

would have been an unmeaning truism. But if, in naming Him, St. Paul is thinking of a Being Whose Nature is such as to make any appearance of His in this earthly sphere in a high degree extraordinary, then to say that He was "born of a woman" is to advance an assertion of startling significance.

Now, that St. Paul is thinking of such a Being is clear. When St. Paul says, "God sent forth His Son," he uses the same word [a] as when he says, "God sent forth the Spirit of His Son." [b] It is a word which does not simply describe the action of God's Providence, whereby He places a being on the scene of created life; it implies a sending forth from the inmost Essence, from the very depths of Deity Itself, of One Who shared the very Nature of the Sender. The Son of God, Whom God sent forth, and Who was born of a woman, was God's own Son, not by grace but by nature; not as being begotten after a lapse of ages, but as, before all worlds, God of God; the Son of God, in a sense unshared by any other, because not other or less than God the Son.

That this is St. Paul's true mind is plain, if we only consider that account of the Son of God which occurs at the beginning of the Epistle to the Colossians. "He is the Image of the Invisible God, the Firstborn of all creation: *for* in Him were all things created in Heaven and on earth, things visible and things invisible: all things have been created by Him, and for Him: and He is before all things, and in Him all things consist." [c] And to say that such a Being as this was born of a woman, is certainly not a truism; it is not an assertion which we should have been prepared to accept unless we were assured of it on sufficient, that is to say, Divine authority. For it means nothing else or less than the

[a] ἐξαπέστειλε. [b] Gal. iv. 6. [c] Col. i. 15–17.

union of things utterly apart from each other; the union of the Immaterial with matter; the union of the Infinite with the finite; the union of a creature with the Creator.

What was the purpose of this union? We shall best answer that question if we ask another: What was the great trouble of the human soul before Christ our Lord came among us? Surely it was the practical inaccessibility of God.

The first truth which was revealed to Israel, and which protected the true idea of God in the mind of Israel, was that "in the beginning God created the Heaven and the earth."[a] This is a truth which, from the nature of the case, could only come by revelation; no man or angel ever witnessed the creation out of nothing. The effect of this truth was to reveal God as having a double relation to the universe. He is, first of all, its Owner; Who has, as such, an absolute disposal of it. He is, secondly, Himself entirely distinct from it. This is the most striking of the two truths implied in the Creation; the profound, impassable, immeasurable gulf between the Creator and His work.

The old paganism was always linking God to Nature, or burying Him in Nature. In ancient Greece, every river, every wood, had its attendant deities; in India, the dawn, the sun, the earth, were worshipped as instinct with Divinity; in the great plain of Chaldæa, the heavenly host, or later, the element of fire; in Phœnicia, the productive powers of Nature. Israel, indeed, knew that "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handy-work."[b] But in Israel, faith in God as the Creator made it impossible to confound Him with the work of His Hands. For Israel, He was "the High and Holy One, that inhabiteth Eternity;"[c] He was beyond

[a] Gen. i. 1. [b] Ps. xix. 1. [c] Isa. lvii. 15.

Nature; beyond human thought and aspiration; He was remote, awful, in a higher than the literal sense "making the clouds His chariot, and flying upon the wings of the wind."[a]

Certainly, before our Lord came, much took place from time to time to remind men that God had dealings with the human family. The miraculous occurrences which at intervals are so conspicuous in the history of Israel; the appearances to Abraham; the Shekinah; the series of prophetic visions;—these were all intended to teach men, among other things, that God had not left them to themselves. But still the cry of Israel was, "O God, why art Thou absent from us so long?"[b] "Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens and come down!"[c] or of believers beyond the frontiers of Israel: "Oh that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even unto His seat! . . . Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward but I cannot perceive Him."[d] As human inquiry, when Jew and Greek had met at Alexandria, felt more and more eagerly after the transcendental and absolute Being, living in a life of unruffled and majestic calm, beyond the perpetual flux and disturbance whether of created thought or of created matter; so God seemed to become more and more abstract and unattainable. More and more did He seem to elude the importunate search of the human understanding, while He said less and less to the yearnings of the human heart.

This, then, was a first object with the Eternal Son when He was "born of a woman;" He willed to put Himself within reach of His creatures. He willed to give a palpable proof of the saying that "His delights are with the sons of men."[e] He, the Immaterial, became related

[a] Ps. civ. 5; xviii. 10. [b] *Ib.* lxxiv. 1. [c] Is. lxiv. 1.
[d] Job xxiii. 3, 8. [e] Prov. viii. 31.

intimately and for ever to a material body; He, the Infinite, condescended to take a finite form; He, the Creator, entered into indissoluble alliance with the work of His Hands. And thus, as St. John wrote in ecstasy, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (for the Life was manifested, and we have seen It, and bear witness, and show unto you that Eternal Life, Which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That Which we have seen and heard declare we unto you." [a] The remote, abstract, inaccessible God was really within reach; He was "the Word made Flesh;" [b] He was seen and handled; He was laid in the manger of Bethlehem.

Yes! it has been said, you Christians may be right in teaching some sort of Incarnation; your doctrine certainly does more justice to the idea of God than the arid conception of isolated, unapproachable Deity; it is an improvement on the idea of an omnipotent watchmaker, who makes his watch and then leaves it to work as best it may. But your mistake lies in supposing God to be incarnate only in a single Human Form. He is really incarnate, as Schelling has said, in the human race. Humanity is the true son of God, the true veil of the Eternal Word; and this sublime representation must not be dwarfed down to the New Testament idea of an Incarnation only in Jesus of Nazareth.

Now, here, it is obvious to remark, first of all, that if God is incarnate in the human race as a whole, the human race is quite unaccountably unconscious of its high prerogative. For the most part, when it has not forgotten or misconceived Him altogether, it has conceived of Him as infinitely distant from it, as hopelessly, disastrously, out of

[a] 1 St. John i. 1-3. [b] St. John i. 14.

its reach. But, apart from this, just consider what an Incarnation in the human race means. It means the intimate and voluntary union of the All-holy with a race steeped in moral evil. If one fact is certain from revelation and experience, it is that all have sinned;[a] it is that there is none righteous, no, not one;[b] it is that the human heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.[c] This is the witness, not only of Jewish Prophets and of Christian Apostles, but also of heathen sages and poets, who betray indirectly when they do not directly express their sense of the evil that surrounds them. And is it conceivable that He, Who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity,[d] did yet really make Himself one with a nature still impregnated with evil? Was the humanity which lied, and shed blood, and revelled, and imbruted itself in Egypt, in Phœnicia, in Chaldæa, in imperial Rome, the true robe of the Infinitely Holy? Can we suppose that He is thus Himself primarily and directly responsible for all the crimes which constitute the staple of human history; that He is, in fact, not so much the Redeemer from sin as the original sinner? No; if an Incarnation was to take place in which God's Purity was to be safe-guarded, He must select one from among the race, who might truly represent it, and yet be free from its pollutions. And "God sent forth His Son," not when He created the human family, but "when the fulness of the time was come;" and His Son was born of one human being; "born of a woman."

II.

"Born of a woman!" The words have a yet more precise meaning; they do not merely affirm, they deny;

[a] Rom. iii. 23. [b] *Ib.* 10. [c] Jer. xvii. 9. [d] Hab. i. 13.

their silence is as exclusive as their positive import is significant. Nothing is said of another earthly parent; no human father is named as the instrument of Divine Providence; the Apostle is thinking, we may assert with confidence, of our Lord's Birth of a Virgin-Mother. As we say in the Creed, "He was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary."

It has been observed, especially in modern times, that there is no clear reference to the miraculous Conception of our Lord in the writings of St. Paul; and it must be allowed that, considering the extent of these writings, and the great importance of the fact, this is remarkable. But it will be also noted, first, that there is no one occasion in his writings on which such a reference would seem to be, at least, logically imperative, or even needful, in order to strengthen the writer's position; while, on the other hand, St. Luke's Gospel, which was written under St. Paul's direction, and which from first to last illustrates all that is distinctive in his teaching, gives the fullest account of the circumstances of our Lord's Conception and Birth which we have in the New Testament. It is reasonable, then, to conclude that the word "woman" in this place is emphatic; it not merely tells us that our Lord condescended to be born of an earthly parent, but it also implies, very pointedly, that He had only one parent,—His Blessed Mother.

In considering our Lord's Birth of a Virgin-Mother, we have always to remember that it was a first necessity that the Redeemer of mankind should be sinless. If He was to help our race out of its tradition of moral degradation, He must have no part in the evil which it was His work to put away. "Such an High Priest became us, Who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners."[a]

[a] Heb. vii. 26.

But, then, human sin was not merely actual, but original. It was not merely a result of each man's separate life and responsibility, but, in consequence of the withdrawal after Adam's transgression of God's first gift of righteousness, it was a warp of the human will, a dulness of the human affections and intelligence, a subtle ingredient of the common character. It was a tradition, gathering volume and intensity as it passed down the centuries; it was an entail, from the obligations of which successive generations could not escape. Men have constantly resented, as they resent to-day, the idea of such an inheritance of evil. But they act, at least in social and public matters, upon the presumption that it is true. Man is ever on his guard against his brother-man, as though he were a disguised or possible enemy. Society protects itself by laws against human nature; its laws would be a gratuitous and insulting libel if human nature were by instinct, and originally, sinless. Thus for the apparition of a sinless Being, truly sharing in our common nature, yet absolutely free from its inheritance of evil, some striking irregularity in the transmission of natural life, some flaw, conspicuous and intentional, was plainly suitable, in order to mark the entrance upon the earthly scene of One Who shared in the tradition of flesh and blood, without sharing in the tradition of sin. This was the meaning of our Lord's Birth of a Virgin-Mother; it was because "He became sin for us, Who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him,"[a] that He was, in this emphatic and exclusive sense, "born of a woman."

But there is another aspect of this circumstance which, among some which must be passed over, claims especial notice to-day. The position of women in the ancient world was, generally, one of deep degradation. There are

[a] 2 Cor. v. 21.

some great and saintly women in ancient Israel; Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Huldah. There are women who are socially or politically great in paganism, without being saintly; Semiramis, Aspasia, Sappho, some wives or mothers of the Cæsars. But, as a rule, in antiquity women were degraded. They were at the mercy of the caprice and the passions of men; they lived, as they generally live to-day in the Moslem East, a sickly life, in which the luxuries of a petted seclusion scarcely disguise the hard realities of their fate. Yet, then, as now, women were the larger part of the human family; and one object of the Divine Incarnation was to put woman's life on a totally new footing within the precincts of the Church of the redeemed. This was done when the Redeemer Himself, God's own Eternal Son, owning no earthly father, yet deigned to be "born of a woman." The highest honours ever attained by or bestowed upon the noblest or the saintliest members of the stronger sex, surely pale into insignificance when they are contrasted with the altogether unique prerogative of Mary. She herself, in the Hymn of the Incarnation, is already conscious of this. Let us think of the best man or woman we have ever known in life, and ask ourselves if it would be possible for him or her to say, without presumption or absurdity, "Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed."[a] But Mary utters these words, and Christendom verifies them from age to age. To have been the Mother of the Divine Redeemer is a privilege unshared and incommunicable, and it sheds a glory upon all Christian women to the end of time. It is this fact which has silently created that rare and beautiful feeling in Christendom, which in the Middle Ages became chivalry, but which is wider and more lasting than to be identified

[a] St. Luke i. 48.

with any one age of the Church's life. Without the aid of legislation, without reducing itself to a theory or a philosophy, this feeling insensibly corrected the wrongs of centuries, and secured for women that tender respect and deference which is the true safeguard of their commanding influence, and which alone secures it.

We have lived on into a time when this feature of our Christian civilization seems to be for the moment imperilled. We are told that the condition of woman in Christendom is one of undue subjection; and efforts are being made to place her, in a new sense, on an equality with man, by giving her a man's education, a man's tastes, a man's ambitions, a man's occupations, a man's character. The difference between these modern efforts to improve the condition of women, and that of our Divine Redeemer when He entered this world as the Son of a Virgin-Mother, is that He respected the characteristic virtues and graces of the sex, while persons in our day imperil or sacrifice them. It is easier to produce an occasional Catharine de Medici of France, or a Catharine II. of Russia, than a St. Agnes, or a St. Monica, or a Eugenie de Guerin, or a Hannah More. It is easier to unsex woman, by making her man's rival in the struggle of life, and a pallid caricature of masculine self-assertion, than to develop those qualities of purity, modesty, self-devotion, in which her highest power and excellence consist. The new friends of woman are not her best friends; they are tempting her to engage in a rivalry with man on his own ground, in which she must ultimately be worsted. Mary, the meekest and lowliest of maidens, is also the very first of women; nay, in her office, she is the very first of human beings who are only human; and it is her sweetness, her grace, her modesty, which so admirably adorn her rank. As St. Paul says, in a passage which has been misunderstood,

woman is saved by "the Child-bearing;" that is to say, by the Birth of the Divine Child of His Virgin-Mother.[a]

Depend on it, my brethren, the best guarantee of woman's liberty and influence is to be found in the fact that the Eternal Son deigned to be born of a woman.

III.

"Born of a woman!" The words suggest one further consideration; they bring before us God's Everlasting Son entering into the life of a human family by becoming one of its members. The life of the family is, indeed, older than Christianity; it is grounded on facts and instincts of nature; it is, in the last analysis, the product of the action of man's reason and conscience upon his rudimentary natural instincts. But the nature and sacredness of family life has been recognized with very different degrees of clearness in different ages and countries of the world. It has had to contend with selfish passions always threatening to break it up, and, in particular, with the widespread and degrading institution of polygamy. Those who have best understood the true well-being of our race have ever laboured to uphold family life as the safeguard of personal purity, and as the firmest foundation of social order. Now, when our Lord condescended to be born of a woman, He became a member of a human family, and He bestowed upon family life the greatest consecration it has ever received since the beginning of human history. He had, indeed, no earthly father, but He was subject to His foster-father St. Joseph, as to His own Mother Mary; He was subject while He blessed them. In every age Christians have loved to dwell upon the picture of that incomparable

[a] 1 Tim. ii. 15, *διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας.* Cf. Ellicott, *in loc.*

home, first at Bethlehem and then at Nazareth; that home in which Mary presided, and for which Joseph toiled, and in which Jesus was nursed and trained. No homestead, we may be sure, ever rivalled the moral beauties of that which was set up on earth when the Son of God was born of a woman. From that day to this He has been the inspiring, regulating, combining Influence in all Christian households. In the Christian father, we trace His moral authority; in the Christian mother, His tenderness and love; in the Christian child, His lowly obedience. He sweetened and consecrated family life for all time, when He deigned to enter it by being "born of a woman." And hence we may see why it is that Christmas is the most popular festival of the Church in those countries in which the family is, to all appearance, strongest. It is notably more popular in England than in France, and nowhere throughout Christendom more popular than in England. Such predilections are decided by the unreasoning instinct of nations; an instinct which nevertheless has a reason of its own.

We know that in the later years of our Lord's earthly life, when His day of public work was come, He sat easily to family ties. He would not allow them to interfere with more sacred and constraining duties. "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?"[a] were the first words which marked the approach of this new period. And the day came when He left His home, His Mother, His foster-father, His cousins, and when He could even ask, "Who is My mother, and who are My brethren?"[b]

These later phases and moods of His Human Life, when it was detached, in a painful and sublime isolation, from the dearest ties of home and kindred, have always their lessons, stern yet sweet, for predestined souls. But, for

[a] St. Luke ii. 49. [b] St. Matt. xii. 48.

most of us, that point in the Life of our Lord Jesus Christ at which He became a Member of a human family naturally attracts the strongest and most eager interest. The deepest thought in all our Christmas rejoicings, in those meetings of families which never meet save once in the year, is that when the Son of God deigned to come into our world, it was in appearance as the weakest and most dependent Member of a human family, yet as the true Consecrator and Upholder of family life. One of the many blessings of Christmas is that it draws families together. Those who can meet, do meet; those who cannot meet, exchange greetings of affection and kindliness. In this work, the moral and social value of which no thoughtful person will underrate, women discharge a far higher and more effective part than men. The Prince of Peace —the Healer of our wounds, personal, domestic, religious, social—sent forth from the Father, is "born of a woman." In promoting this work, women cannot well overrate their power; they may easily think too cheaply of their opportunities. Few, if any, women have not some work of this kind ready to their hands to do; they will find their happiness and their sense of capacity greatly enhanced by doing it.

Sermons, we all know, are not always welcome on the great festivals of the Christian Church; they make too large a demand on Christian feeling. The really critical events in a family history are better thought over than talked about, at least at the time of their occurrence. And thus, when Advent is over, we may long to spend Christmas, so far as may be, in prayer and praise; to talk with our Incarnate Lord instead of being talked to about Him by one of His creatures.

Be it so, my brethren; but let us be sure that if Christian feeling is too sensitive easily to bear with the intrusions

of human language, it is, when healthy and sincere, never incapable of expressing itself in work. Let not this bright week, consecrated throughout to the Nativity of our Lord, pass without our each doing some one work of mercy and self-sacrifice, to His praise and glory, Who for the love of us deigned to become Man. Some poor family may be clothed or fed; some sore and broken heart may be comforted; some unwelcome duty, which will lighten another's burden, perhaps save his health from premature decay, may be cheerfully undertaken. If any should need some definite suggestion, we may send something to the Fund for the Irish Ladies in Distress; or we may help, according to our power, the noble Mission of the Universities in Central Africa. There are abundant opportunities of kindly service. Only let us keep our eye fixed on Him Whom the Father sent forth, and Who was born of a woman, and there will be no question, for any long time, what to do or how to do it.

SERMON VI.

BORN OF A VIRGIN.

(SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.)

ST. MATT. I. 22, 23.

Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the Prophet, saying, Behold, a Virgin shall be with Child, and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call His Name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

MANY readers of the Bible must be struck by the reason which St. Matthew here gives for the occurrences connected with the Birth of Christ: "All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the Prophet." Perhaps we whisper to ourselves that the event predicted is, after all, more important than the prediction; and that it would have been more natural to say that the prophecy existed for the sake of the event, than the event for the sake of the prophecy; that Isaiah's utterance was meant to prepare the world for Jesus Christ, than that the Birth of Jesus Christ was designed to justify Isaiah. But, in truth, both the prophecy and its fulfilment were from God; and the independent and higher importance of the event is not inconsistent with its being also a certificate of the Prophet's accuracy. There were other reasons, no doubt, for the Birth of Jesus Christ of

a Virgin-Mother; but one reason for it was that it was already foretold on Divine authority. And it fell in with St. Matthew's general plan throughout his Gospel, to insist on this particular reason. He wrote for Churches consisting almost entirely of converts from Judaism; and he is concerned, at almost every step of his narrative, to show that the Life of Jesus, in all its particulars, corresponded to the statements of Jewish prophecy, as understood by the Jews themselves, respecting the coming Messiah. So he begins at the beginning, with the Birth of Christ; and he says that Jesus was born just as Isaiah had said that Christ would be born, and, among other reasons, because Isaiah had said so. Those first Jewish Christians might feel wonder, even scandal, when first they heard of the embarrassment of St. Joseph, and of the Angelic assurances; but they had only to open the roll of prophecy to find that the history had been accurately anticipated. "All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the Prophet, saying, Behold, a Virgin shall be with Child, and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call His Name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." In St. Matthew's eyes, then, Isaiah is almost as much the historian as he is the Prophet of our Lord's Nativity. But is it clear that when Isaiah uttered the words which are quoted he meant to predict such an event as St. Matthew records?

It has been suggested that this was not really Isaiah's meaning; that Isaiah had in view some other event, at once nearer to his own times, and more commonplace and ordinary than the Birth of the Redeemer; and that St. Matthew accommodates the Prophet's language, by a gentle pressure, to the necessities of the supernatural account which he is himself narrating. And a main

reason which is urged for this view of Isaiah's meaning is, that if we look to the circumstances under which his prophecy was uttered, it is difficult to think that so distant an event as the Birth of Messiah would have at all served his purpose in giving a sign to Ahaz.

What, then, were the circumstances which led Isaiah to proclaim, "Behold, a Virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His Name Emmanuel"?[a] Ahaz, the King of Judah, was besieged in his capital by the allied forces of Israel and Syria, under their kings Pekah and Rezin. These kings were really leagued against the rising empire of Assyria; but they thought that they would best consolidate their own power in Palestine by deposing the reigning family of David from the throne of Jerusalem and setting up a vassal monarch, "the son of Tabeal,"[b] on whose services they could reckon in the approaching struggle with Assyria. Isaiah was sent to encourage Ahaz and his son to make a stout resistance, and to assure them that, notwithstanding the project of the allied kings, God would be faithful to His covenant with David. These associated kings, Isaiah says, need occasion Ahaz no anxiety; they were like brands that are nearly burnt out; there was no Divine force in Syria, and no political future for Israel. Ahaz had only to trust God; all would be well.

Ahaz was silent; silent because suspicious and distrustful. And then Isaiah bade him ask for some token which might assure him of God's presence with and good will towards him. "Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above."[c] Had Ahaz then asked for a token of God's good will towards himself personally, or his immediate descendants, it would, no doubt, have been granted. But Ahaz was bent upon

[a] Isa. vii. 14. [b] *Ib.* 6. [c] *Ib.* 11.

an irreligious policy of his own; he thought that, by the aid of Assyria, he would be able to do without the God and the religion of his ancestors; he looked on God and His Prophets as personal enemies who thwarted his plans; and he did not wish, by asking for a sign, to commit himself to a religious creed and system with which, he hoped, he had parted company for ever. Yet Ahaz, standing before the Prophet, could not refuse to say anything; he must accept or decline the invitation to ask for a sign. He declined to do so; and, as irreligious people often do in like circumstances, he pleaded a religious scruple as the reason for his refusal. The old Law had warned Israel against tempting the Lord by asking for new evidences or "signs" of such truth as was already sufficiently attested;[a] and Ahaz, who had resorted freely to the forbidden arts of necromancy gravely produced this entirely insincere reason to account for his resolve: "I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord."[b]

Then it was that Isaiah spoke, not without righteous anger, to King Ahaz and his son. "Hear ye now, ye house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign."[c] A sign would be given, but Ahaz could now no longer determine its drift and character. It would show that God would be true to His promises to David; but it would afford scant encouragement to the personal ambitions of the degenerate descendants of the man after God's own heart. The earthly throne of David might perish; but the promise of unfailing empire made to David would still be safe, though it would be fulfilled in a distant age, and by unthought-of agencies. Just as Moses was assured that God had sent him, by the sign of a future deliverance from Egypt,

[a] Deut. vi. 16. [b] Isa. vii. 12. [c] *Ib.* 13.

which at the time seemed impossible;[a] so religious Jews of Isaiah's day, for whom Isaiah was really speaking, were to be assured of the safety of the great religious interests entrusted to the House of David, by a sign or predicted wonder, without parallel in history, but designed to convince them that God might punish the rebellious kings of Judah, and yet work out the promised salvation of Israel and the human race. "Behold," Isaiah cries, as he gazes across the centuries at the picture which passes before him—"Behold, *the* Virgin"—the language shows that he is thinking of one in particular—"is with Child, and beareth a Son, and shall call His Name Emmanuel."[b]

It was, then, no part of Isaiah's plan to give a sign which should assure Ahaz of present deliverance; he had done that before in plain language. And when he utters the prophecy quoted by St. Matthew, he has other and higher objects before him, the nature of which must be determined, not by the real or supposed state of mind of Ahaz, but by the natural force of the Prophet's words.

Here, then, let us consider the importance of the event to which Isaiah thus looks forward, and which the Evangelist describes as fulfilled.

I.

This importance is seen, first of all, in the strictly preternatural character of the occurrence itself. "Behold, a Virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son." The foil to this prediction is the universal law, by which our race is transmitted, that a child must have two human parents. St. Matthew is explicit in his account of the events which preceded our Lord's Birth; but it has been contended

[a] Exod. iii. 12. [b] Isa. vii. 14.

that the word[a] which Isaiah uses, and which is translated "virgin," may mean a young but married woman. If this were the meaning, it is difficult to see why there should be any allusion to the mother at all, since the predicted child would only be born like all other children, and would not be a sign in the Prophet's sense. But the Hebrew word for "virgin" is used of Rebekah[b] before her marriage with Isaac; of Miriam,[c] the maiden sister of the infant Moses; and in five other places[d] in which it is found in the Old Testament there is no reasonable ground for thinking that any but unmarried women are meant. I do not forget the names of scholars who, moved apparently by extraneous considerations, have disputed the accuracy of the authorized translation; but one fact in connection with it is instructive, and may throw a great deal of light upon more recent criticism. When the first translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek was made, some two centuries at the least before our Lord, in Alexandria, and nothing was supposed to be at stake, the Jewish translators rendered this word of Isaiah's by "virgin."[e] But when, in the second century of our era, Aquila, a Jewish proselyte of Sinope, having his eye upon the Christian appeal to Jewish prophecy, undertook a new translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, he rendered it by "a young woman."[f] If in our day the point could be decided by the natural force of language, without reference to the claims of Christianity or the

[a] Etymologically, עַלְמָה may mean a marriageable maiden (עָלַם, *adolescere*); but in the Old Testament there is no proof of its being applied to any but the unmarried. To determine the sense of such words by that which they, or their roots, bear in the cognate dialects, is a common source of error.

[b] Gen. xxiv. 43.

[c] Exod. ii. 8.

[d] 1 Chron. xv. 20; Ps. lxviii. 25; Prov. xxx. 19; Song of Sol. i. 3; vi. 8.

[e] LXX., παρθένος.

[f] νεᾶνις, Aquila.

possibility of the preternatural, there would not be much doubt upon the subject.

For Christians, who bow to the authority of the Gospel, there can be no doubt. After describing our Lord's Birth of a Virgin-Mother, St. Matthew adds, "Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the Prophet, saying, Behold, a Virgin shall be with Child, and shall bring forth a Son." If the Prophet whom St. Matthew quotes said nothing about a "Virgin," but was only predicting a marriageable maiden, and a natural birth, St. Matthew's quotation is not only irrelevant; it is an attempt, by means of a false translation, to claim for his narrative the sanction of prophecy. If we are not prepared to say that the ignorance or the bad faith of the Evangelist is fatal to his authority as a religious teacher, we must continue to read the Prophet as our forefathers read him; we must believe him to have foretold that Emmanuel would be born of a Virgin-Mother.

The Birth of Jesus Christ is not unfrequently discussed in our day, as the birth of a great man, but without reference to the virginity of His Mother. Isaiah's prediction and St. Matthew's narrative are passed over, as if they were not of much importance to our estimate of the event. My brethren, it is necessary to say plainly that the account in the Gospel is either true or false. If it is false, it ought to be repudiated by honest men as a baseless superstition. If, as we Christians believe, it is true, then it is a very momentous truth; it implies a great deal more than is to be expressed by saying that the Son of the Virgin was a great or extraordinary Man; it carries us beyond the limits of nature and ordinary experience.

Doubtless, here and there in the heathen world, there were legends of sages or poets who were born of virgins;

but these legends are related to the history of our Saviour's Birth, as are false to true miracles. As the counterfeit miracle implies the real miracle of which it is a counterfeit, so the idea of a virgin-birth, here and there discoverable in paganism, points to a deep instinct of the human race, and to a high probability that the Absolute Religion would satisfy it. Men felt, pagans though they were, the oppression and degradation of their hereditary nature; they longed for some break in the tyrannical tradition of flesh and blood; they longed for the appearance of some being who should still belong to them, yet in a manner so exceptional as to be able to inaugurate a new era in humanity. Revelation, surely, is not less trustworthy because it recognizes an instinct which only led men to do it justice, and which was in accordance with moral truth.

II.

For here we touch upon a primary reason for our Lord's preternatural Birth. If He was to raise us from our degradation, He must Himself be sinless; a sinless Example and a sinless Sacrifice. Our Lord Himself and His Apostles abundantly insist upon this His sinlessness;[a] but how was it to be secured if He was indeed to become incorporate with a race which was steeped in a tradition of evil? When, by his transgression, our first parent had forfeited the robe of grace in which God had clothed him in Paradise, he passed on to his descendants a nature so impoverished, as to be biassed in a wrong direction; thenceforth evil had the upper hand in human nature. It descended, like a bad name or a disease, from generation to generation; and though here or there, as with Jeremiah[b]

[a] St. John viii. 46; 2 Cor. v. 21; 1 St. Pet. ii. 22. [b] Jer. i. 5.

or the Baptist,[a] there was a special sanctification before birth, yet the millions of mankind had to say with David, "Behold, I was shapen in wickedness, and in sin hath my mother conceived me."[b] How, then, was this fatal entail to be cut off so decisively that all should understand the enfranchisement? The Birth of a Virgin was the answer to that question. The Virgin's Son was still human; but in Him humanity had inherited no part of that bad legacy which came across the ages from the Fall. And truly, "such an High Priest became us, holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners."[c]

This, indeed, as you will have anticipated, is not the whole account of the matter. The Birth of Jesus Christ, as we Christians believe, marked the entrance into the sphere of sense and time of One Who had already existed from eternity. At His Birth, as St. Paul says, He was "manifested in the flesh;"[d] but whether in this passage He is called God or not, the Apostle's words at the least imply that our Lord existed before His manifestation in time. The Father "sent forth His Son, made of a woman," as St. Paul again tells us in the Epistle for to-day.[e] But the Son existed before He was sent forth; the expression is evidently chosen to imply this. And this previous existence did not date from creation; for "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."[f]

How was the entrance of such a Being into this our world so to be marked as to show that He did not originally owe existence to a human parent? We could not have dared to answer such a question beforehand; but we can see how it is answered by our Lord's Birth of

[a] St. Luke i. 15. [b] Ps. li. 5. [c] Heb. vii. 26.
[d] 1 Tim. iii. 16; cf. pp. 108, 109.
[e] Sunday after Christmas Day: Gal. iv. 4. [f] St. John i. 1.

a Virgin. Was it not natural that Nature should thus suspend her laws to welcome the approach and the blessing of her Maker?

III.

The significance of our Lord's Birth of a Virgin-Mother may also be gathered from its results.

At this distance of time we can see that no other birth, since the beginning of history, has involved such important consequences to the human race. We Christians have had nearly nineteen centuries in which to form comparisons and to arrive at conclusions. We have had time to take the measure of the great statesmen, soldiers, poets, teachers, who have been foremost among mankind. Who of them all has left behind him a work which can compare with that achieved by Jesus Christ? Napoleon I. once set himself to contrast the empires of Alexander, of Cæsar, and his own, with that of our Lord and Saviour. Theirs were transient, His is lasting; theirs had reached a limit, His is ever extending; theirs were based on force, His is based on convictions. Who, again, of the great men of letters has swayed the world like Jesus Christ? Doubtless they, too, have an empire. Who can dispute the influence at this hour of Plato, of Shakespeare, of Bacon? But it is an influence which differs in kind from His: they only interest the intellect, while He subdues the will. Nay, compare Him with the great teachers of false religions; with Sakya-Mouni, who preceded, or with Mohammad, who followed Him. Certainly Buddhism outnumbers Christendom; and we cannot deny the activity of Islam in certain portions of the Eastern world. But these religions are the religions of races with no real future. Christianity is the Creed of the nations which year by year are more and more controlling the destinies

of our race. And if it be urged that large portions of the European nations, Christian by profession, are now abjuring Christianity, it may be replied that such an apostasy will not last. Man cannot dispense with Religion; and when he has come into contact with the highest type of Religion, he has thereby exhausted the religious capacities of his nature; the Absolute Religion makes any other impossible for free and sincere minds. The present efforts to replace Christianity by an imaginary religion of the future, distilled out of all the positive religions of the world, is doomed to a failure only less complete than the attempt to replace it by mere negations. There are not wanting signs of a rebound towards the Faith; there are no signs whatever of a rising religious force capable of superseding it. Meanwhile, all that is best and most full of hope in the civilized world dates from the Birthday of Jesus Christ. Doubtless we owe to the old pagan days some things which rank high in the order of nature. We owe philosophy to Greece, and law and well-ordered life to Rome. But the idea of progress, which, however it may have been misapplied, is perhaps the most fertile and energetic idea in modern public life, is a creation of the Christian Creed. It springs from these high hopes for the future, whether of individuals or of the race, which Christ has taught His disciples to entertain, out of pure loyalty to Himself. And such institutions as hospitals, which make life tolerable for the suffering classes, that is, for the majority of human beings, date, one and all, from the appearance of Jesus Christ, and from the principles which He proclaimed to men with sovereign authority.

To take one point among many, the position of women in Christian society is directly traceable, not only to our Lord's teaching, but to the circumstances of His Birth.

Before He came, woman, even in Israel, was little better than the slave of man; in the heathen world, as in Eastern countries now, she was a slave, to all intents and purposes. Here and there a woman of great force of character, joined to hereditary advantages, might emerge from this chronic oppression; she might become a Deborah, a Semiramis, a Cleopatra, a Boadicea, or a Zenobia; she might control the world, or at least its rulers. But the lot of the majority of women was a suffering and degraded one. Now, when Christ took upon Him to deliver man, He did not abhor the Virgin's womb. In the greatest event in the whole course of human history the stronger sex had no part whatever. The Incarnate Son was conceived of the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary. And therefore in Mary woman rose to a position of consideration unknown before. Nothing was forfeited that belongs to the true modesty and grace of woman's nature, but the larger share of influence, in shaping the destinies of the Christian races, was secured to her in perpetuity. It was the Incarnation which created chivalry, and all those better features of modern life which are due to it. And surely they are no true friends to the real influence and usefulness of women who would substitute for the Christian ideal of womanhood another, in which she is to compete for awhile with man in all the bustling energy of his public life, and in the end to be relegated to some such social fate as will inevitably follow upon unsuccessful rivalry.

But these outward and visible results of the Birth of Christ were far from being the most important. It is conceivable that such results as these might have been due to a religious genius of commanding influence, or to a man invested with miraculous powers, but still altogether and only a man. The Birth of Jesus Christ meant

much more than this. It was the entrance of the Word made Flesh into the scene of sense and time; it was the manifestation of God by His taking our nature upon Him.

Before the Incarnation there was a great gulf fixed between God and man. Man could think about God; he could pray to Him; he could practise a certain measure of obedience to His Will. But in his best moments man was conscious of his utter separateness from God, as the Perfect Moral Being. He was conscious of sin; and this meant nothing less than separation from the All-holy.

The Incarnation of Jesus Christ was a bridge across the chasm which thus parted earth and Heaven. On the one hand, and from everlasting, Jesus Christ is of one Substance with the Father, Very and Eternal God; on the other, He was made very Man, of the substance of the Virgin Mary, His Mother. As the Collect says, "He took man's nature upon Him." When He had already existed from Eternity, He folded around Him, and made His own, a created form, a Human Body and a Human Soul, to be for ever united to His Eternal Godhead. Through this His Human Nature He acts, on God's behalf, upon mankind. Through this His Human Nature He pleads for man before the Majesty of God. Thus there is "one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus."[a] It is as Man that He mediates between the Creator and the creature, between sinners and the All-holy; but His Godhead secures to His mediation its commanding power. If He were not Human, we should be unrepresented in Heaven, where He ever liveth to make intercession for us.[b] If He were not Divine, it would be impossible to say why His Death upon the Cross should have infinite merit; or why "the Body of Jesus Christ, which was given for us," should now, in the Holy Sacra-

[a] 1 Tim. ii. 5. [b] Heb. vii. 25.

ment, "preserve our bodies and souls unto everlasting life."[a] As Mediator He is at one and the same moment in the bosom of the Godhead, and in the closest contact with the souls of His redeemed; and this is a result of His entrance, clad in a Created Form, into our human world, being as He is the Everlasting Son, yet withal the Child of Mary.

That this is the deepest meaning of Christmas, and of the Birth of Christ, is implied in the Name assigned by prophecy[b] to the Virgin's Son—the sublime Name, Emmanuel. From the day of the Nativity God was with man, not simply as heretofore, as the Omnipresent, but under new and more intimate conditions. From the day of the Nativity there was a change in the relations between earth and Heaven. To be one with Christ was to be one with God; and this union with God through Christ is the secret and basis of the new kingdom of souls which Christ has founded, and in which He reigns. Who shall describe the wealth of spiritual and moral power which dates from the appearance of the Incarnate Son in our human world, as our "Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption?"[c] Here and there we see through the clouds, as though by glimpses, some streaks of the glory of this Invisible Kingdom of souls; but only in another life shall we understand at all approximately what it has meant for millions of our race.

IV.

And here, though we are still only on the threshold of the subject, we must note two points in conclusion.

1. Observe the contrast between the real and the apparent importance of the Birth of Christ. To human

[a] Words of Administration at the Holy Communion.
[b] Isa. vii. 14. [c] 1 Cor. i. 30.

sense, the event which took place at Bethlehem may well have seemed at the time commonplace enough. An Infant was born under circumstances of hardship; in a wayside stable. To those who did not look closely into the circumstances, it might have occurred that a like event had often happened before, and would often be repeated. Everybody did not hear the song of the Angels, or mark the bearing of the Virgin-Mother and of her saintly spouse. The Kingdom of God had entered into history, but certainly "not with observation."[a] Nay, more, even among the worshippers of Christ the full meaning of His Birth, as opening a new era in the history of the human race, was not at once practically appreciated. For five centuries and a half, Christians still reckoned the passing years by the names of the Roman consuls or by the era of Diocletian, just like the pagans around them. It was only in the year 541 that Dionysius the Little, a pious and learned person at Rome, first ranged the history of mankind around the most important event in it—the Birthday of Jesus Christ. Christendom at once recognized the justice of this way of reckoning time; and no attempts to supersede it, such as that which was made in France during the First Revolution, have since had a chance of success. But how often do we use the phrase, "the year of our Lord," without reflecting that it proclaims the Birth of Jesus Christ to be an event of such commanding importance that all else in human history, rightly understood, is merely relative to it; interesting only as it precedes or follows, as it leads up to or is derived from it! Yet, as you know, five centuries and a half passed before this was practically recognized.

So it has been ever since; so it is at this hour. Real importance is one thing, apparent importance another.

[a] St. Luke xvii. 20.

The events which move the world are not always those which men think most noteworthy. The men who most deeply influence their fellows are not those of whom everybody is talking. The currents of thought and feeling which will shape the future are not those which are welcomed by the organs and interpreters of current opinion. When Christ appeared, the Palace of the Cæsar seemed to be more likely to govern the destinies of mankind than the Manger of Bethlehem. No, brethren, depend on it, the apparent is not always, or even generally, the real.

2. The importance of the Birth of Christ must be variously recognized; by the student of history, by the philosopher, by the divine. But there is one aspect of it which, for you and me, is more pressing than any other. What is its practical importance to us now, and in the approaching future? Probably every one in this Cathedral has said to himself to-day, "This is the last Sunday in 1878." Yes, my friends, the hours of this year are quickly running out; and as those of us who have reached or have passed middle life look back on it, we are tempted to say, in the phrase of the Psalmist, "I went by, and lo, it was gone; I sought it, but its place could nowhere be found."[a] It seems, indeed, but yesterday when we were gathered here at the close of 1877; yet since then how much has taken place, how much has there been to think about! And, after all, thought and occupation are the wings of time. Certainly it has been a year of anxieties, a year of struggles, a year of surprises, a year of achievements, a year in which, whether for good or evil, the nations, as the phrase goes, have been "making history." This is not the hour to discuss it controversially; probably those who come after us will be better

[a] Ps. xxxvii. 37.

able than we to bring a large knowledge and a calm impartiality to the estimate of what it has really been to our country and to the human race. But, as it passes, it leaves us Englishmen with a double burden on our hands; widespread distress at home, which, according to our means, it should be our care to alleviate; and one, perhaps two wars, in our dependencies abroad. All who think at all will find in these facts matters for sober and anxious thought; reasons, it may also be, for serious misgivings. But, as the year passes, it sweeps away with it into the abyss of history, into the great company of the dead, many whom, in private or in public, we have known so well; the aged statesman, whose long life had been spent in the ardent struggles of political party;[a] the great missionary bishop, who will rank hereafter in a distant colony with our own Augustine;[b] the divine, in whom, now that he is gone, men have traced the genius and the spirit of Butler,[c] the ruler of the largest portion of the Church of Christ;[d] and, not least, those whom we have most recently mourned—the wife, the Princess, who has shown us how a high station can be consecrated to God by works of charity and benevolence.[e] Yes! they and many others, nearer, it may be, and dearer to us, are now among the dead; and as the passing year bears them with it from our sight, we catch a glimpse of those great realities which we too easily, all of us, forget. It is certain that many who prayed and listened in this

[a] The Right Hon. John, Earl Russell, died May 28, 1878.

[b] The Right Rev. Augustus Selwyn, D.D., Bishop of Lichfield, formerly Bishop of New Zealand, died April 11, 1878.

[c] The Rev. J. B. Mozley, D.D., Canon of Christ Church, Oxford, and Regius Professor of Divinity, died January 4, 1878.

[d] Pope Pius IX. died February 27, 1878.

[e] Her Royal Highness the Grand-Duchess of Hesse, Princess Alice Maud Mary of England, died December 14, 1878.

Cathedral on the last Sunday of 1877 have since passed into the presence of the Eternal Judge. It is certain that many who pray and listen here this afternoon will have followed them before the last Sunday of 1879. Which of us it will be, we know not; but as we think steadily on the undeniable truth, surely some of the mists of our daily thought clear away, and we see things more nearly as they are. In that world there will be no England, but only the souls of Englishmen. In that world there will be no distinctions of race, or rank, or wealth, or accomplishments, but only the great and the ineffaceable distinction between the saved and the lost. Surely, as from this vantage-point of passing time we look out into that coming world, with its blessed and terrific possibilities, with its glories, its solemnities, its nearness to each one of us, we must take heed that, for each one of us, the Birth of the Redeemer shall mark, ere the sacred week has gone, something more than a milestone on the road of life, or the occasion of a family gathering. There is one question which every man here should lose no time whatever in answering, if it be not answered yet: What is my actual relation to Him, Who, for love of me, was conceived of the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary; my present Redeemer, and my future Judge?

SERMON VII.

GOD IN HUMAN FORM.

(FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.)

1 TIM. III. 16.

And without controversy great is the mystery of Godliness: God was manifest in the Flesh.

AT length the Advent Season has reached its close, and we are at Christmas Eve. The season of expectation is over, and we are almost entering on the hours of that bright Festival which the Christian Church keeps as the Birthday of her Founder; the day on which the Saviour of the World was born of a human mother, and came to take His place among the things of time, although Himself "the express Image of" the Father's "Person, and upholding all things by the word of His Power."[a]

And the Apostle's words to Timothy put before us forcibly and concisely the master-truth which gives Christmas its meaning. "Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh." To-morrow is not merely the birthday of a sage or a philanthropist. It is the entrance into our human world of One Who is at once its Architect and its Judge, under conditions, too, which make Him the peer of the poorest

[a] Heb. i. 3.

among us. It is the introduction of a new principle of life into humanity which we thus commemorate; a new starting-point in the world's history, a new fountain of happiness and blessings which were unknown before.

I.

The words, "God was manifest in the Flesh," are translated from a sentence in which the reading is doubtful and the variation remarkable. In the original Greek manuscripts, the presence or absence of a bar across the centre of a single letter here makes all the difference between our reading the substantive "God," or the relative pronoun "Who." It is clearly impossible, here and now, to enter upon a discussion of the critical question, whether this bar ought or ought not to be retained. It may suffice to express the opinion that there is no sufficient reason for changing the original text, so as to alter the rendering of our English Bible.[a] An alteration would naturally be welcome to those persons who desire to make the Bible speak the language of Socinianism, and who see in this text a serious difficulty. And yet even if the reading "God" should be given up, and the reading "Who" substituted for it, the change in the real drift of the passage would not be so great as is sometimes supposed. It is tolerably clear that with this word, whether it be "God" or "Who," the Apostle begins a quotation, probably taken from some Christian Hymn.[b] Now, if the quotation begins with the word "God," it is sufficiently

[a] Long after this sermon was preached, the authors of the Revised Version adopted the change in question, but for reasons which do not appear to be conclusive, and, as it would seem, under a certain bias, which is more distinctly illustrated by their marginal annotations at Rom. ix. 5.

[b] Cf. Mack, *Comm. über die Pastoral briefe*, p. 297.

complete in itself; if with the word "Who," or even "He Who," it is evidently an incomplete fragment, which refers to some person named in the preceding line of the Hymn. But to Whom does this "Who" refer? Now, here the word "manifested" will assist us.[a] If the Person spoken of in the text had had no existence before His Birth, it would not have been natural to speak of Him at His Birth as being "manifested in the Flesh." When an infant is born in any of our families, we do not say that it was "manifested in the flesh." Why not? Because, although that infant now has an immortal soul distinct from its body, although linked with it, and in a certain true sense manifested through it, that soul had no existence independent of and before the body of the infant. We do not speak of a thing being "manifested" at the moment of its first beginning to exist. The idea of manifestation is not opposed to non-existence, but to hidden existence; indeed, manifestation takes for granted a previous unmanifested existence. And, therefore, the phrase, "manifest in the flesh," would be inappropriate and absurd as applied to an ordinary infant at its birth. You might just as well speak of a house being "manifested" in stone or brick when it is built, or of a railway embankment being "manifested" when it is thrown up. Manifestation implies the previous existence of the thing or person manifested; it marks a point in the history of the thing or person, at which it passes out of hidden, into public and visible, life. If, then, the text speaks of a manifestation in the flesh, whether it describes the Person so manifested as "God" or not, it must at the least mean that He existed before this manifestation took place, or, in other words, before His Birth.

[a] Observe the use of *φανεροῦν*, *φανεροῦσθαι*, in St. John ii. 11; vii. 4; ix. 3; Rom. i. 19; Eph. v. 13; Col. i. 26; iii. 4. of making patent to the senses something hidden although really existent.

And apart from all that follows in the later clauses of the quotation, and which at every step rivets and intensifies the argument, this description can only be true of Him Who Alone in Scripture is said to have existed before His Birth into this world. Scripture knows nothing of any Indian doctrine of the transmigration of souls. But He Who was before and, therefore, greater than St. John the Baptist;[a] He Whose glory Isaiah saw, not merely by anticipation, but in actual vision;[b] He Who already exists before Abraham was;[c] He Who was in the beginning, and with God, and by Whom all things were made[d]—did at length, by being "made of a woman, made under the Law,"[e] make Himself manifest to the senses of man. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. . . . And the Word was made Flesh, and dwelt among us."[f]

II.

"God was manifest in the flesh." What were the limits, what the nature, of this manifestation? It is true, for instance, to say that God is manifested in nature; His Attributes shine through His works. "The invisible things of Him are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even His Eternal Power and Godhead."[g] Again, and more strikingly, He is manifested in the human conscience. That sense of right and wrong which every man finds within his soul, whether it be well-informed and educated or not, speaks of an Author. Who is He That has thus lodged in the sanctuary of the soul a witness to His Existence and His claims? "That which may be known of God," by man when in a state of nature,

[a] St. John i. 15. [b] Isa. vi. 1–5. [c] St. John viii. 58. [d] *Ib.* i. 1–3.
[e] Gal. iv. 4. [f] St. John i. 1, 2, 14. [g] Rom. i. 20.

"is manifest" in the Gentiles, says St. Paul; "for God hath showed it unto them."[a] Once more, God is manifested in the course of events, in history. The action of His attributes may be traced, through slow transitions and developments, from one polity to another, one ascendancy to another, one civilization to another. At some great crisis, when men have dreamt that He is unconscious, and letting things take their course, He suddenly awakes, "as one out of sleep, and like a giant refreshed with wine."[b] His Presence, His Power, His Justice, His Love, are felt to be controlling and irradiating contemporary events; and in their recovered sense of His nearness, men cry out with the Prophet, "Thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us, and we are called by Thy Name; leave us not, O Lord our God."[c]

But the manifestation spoken of in the text is clearly distinct from God's Self-manifestation in Nature, in conscience, and in history. It is "in the flesh." That expression ties it down to human nature as the medium of the manifestation, and identifies it, not merely with the spiritual, but with the bodily part of man's composite being. It is a question here, not of a voice in conscience, still less of inferences, however legitimate or irresistible, drawn from Nature and history, but of a revelation clothed in flesh and blood, and addressed to sense. The text does not itself say that this manifestation was exhibited in a single life—the Life of Jesus of Nazareth. Yet the rest of the passage makes it certain that this was the writer's meaning. Unless the whole race of man was "justified of the Spirit, believed on in the world, and received up into glory,"[d] it is impossible to avoid restricting this manifestation in the flesh to the Human Nature, the Body and Soul of Jesus of Nazareth. The Apostle means that God

[a] Rom. i. 19. [b] Ps. lxxviii. 65. [c] Jer. xiv. 9. [d] 1 Tim. iii. 16.

was manifested in this One Member of the human family (we may truly so speak of Him) as in no other. Others had illustrated and reflected some one or more rays of the Perfection of God; His Lovingkindness, or His Justice, or His Veracity. In Jesus God's Moral Life was manifested, not partially or in piecemeal, but in its integrity and completeness. The whole range of the Divine Attributes was there; and when our Lord acted and spoke, God, in His Perfect Nature, became manifest to those who witnessed Him. Instead of saying that in Christ the Intelligence or Thought of God was pre-eminently embodied, it being implied that other elements of the Divine Life were not equally so, St. Paul says that in Christ dwelt "all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."[a] Instead of saying, "He that hath seen Me must have learnt something of what God's Mercy is, or something about His Truth," Christ our Lord says absolutely, and without any limitations or reserve, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."[b]

It has been treated as a difficulty by a certain school of modern thinkers, that this Self-manifestation of God should be thus represented to have taken place in a single Human Life. God, they contend, if manifested in humanity at all, is manifested in humanity as a whole. His Self-manifestation is distributed throughout all the races of men, throughout the whole course of human generations; and the Christian Doctrine of the Incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth, involves an unphilosophical limitation to a single Personality of that which is properly an attribute and glory of the entire family of man.

This objection was forcibly urged by Schelling, and it has been repeated in various forms. It really is connected with the Pantheistic notion that God is not merely

[a] Col. ii. 9. [b] St. John xiv. 9.

the Author of the Universe, which attests His attributes, but that He is the Universe; and that the human race, being the highest form of the universal life of which we have any experience, manifests by its collective activity the entire Life of God. Now, if God were not a Moral Being, if He were only the highest Intelligence, and not also Truth and Justice and Love, there would be more to say for this notion than there is. It might then be pleaded that the boundless resource and versatility of the Infinite Mind would best be exhibited through the powers and activities of many minds. And, assuredly, all intellectual power is God's gift, and, in itself, a ray of His Beauty, even though it be applied to purposes which do Him wrong. But God is essentially a Moral Being. Our most fundamental notion of Him is not that which He has lodged in our intelligence, as the First Cause or Author of this Universe, but that which He has lodged in our conscience as the Author of that Law of Right and Wrong which we see within us, and which is a ray of His own Eternal Nature. We can, without doing any violence to our own mental life, conceive that God might have never made this Universe. He would not have been less Himself had He lived on in the solitary Eternity, which—so we must phrase it, when we speak of these matters from a human point of view—preceded Creation. But we cannot conceive that God could ever have been untruthful or unjust. Why not? Because we cannot conceive that injustice and untruthfulness can ever, under any circumstances, have been right; we cannot, without tearing up our moral nature by the roots, suppose that the moral laws which, as applied to relations between intelligent beings, we term the laws of justice and truthfulness, can ever have been other than they are. Were they, then, eternal laws,

existing independently of God? That cannot be, because, in that case, God is not the One eternally Self-existent Being. They must, being eternal, belong to the Life of the Eternal Being. It is no objection to this that it must also have been always true that things equal to the same are equal to one another; since there is no difficulty in granting that the laws of pure mathematics being necessary truth, must also be laws of the Eternal Life of God, not less than are the laws of morals. Now, observe, if this be so, God could not have manifested Himself in the human race as a whole without doing violence to His necessary Nature. He could not have manifested Himself in mankind at large without mingling His Self-manifestation with all the impurities, all the falsehoods, all the high-handed unrighteousness, all the degrading meanness which go to make up the history of our race. Clearly, the human race being what it is, a manifestation of God in the flesh which is to secure for Him His due, and is to enlighten us, must be in a Sinless Individual; in One, that is, Whose Life does not compromise the sanctity of the Manifested God.

And this, the Christian Faith teaches us, has taken place; it has taken place, once and once only, in human history. In Jesus of Nazareth, the one Sinless Man, was revealed the Perfection of the Indwelling God. His supernatural Birth of a Virgin-Mother was in keeping with the high and unique office of His Manhood, to be thus the Temple of Deity inseparably united to It. And it is this which makes the record of His Life in the Four Holy Gospels unlike any other narrative on which we can set our eyes; it is a history, not merely of a perfect human character, but of "God manifest in the Flesh."

III.

Why, we must next ask, was God thus manifested?

Many answers in detail may be given, To instruct us, to redeem us, to sanctify us. But the general answer is, To bring God near to the heart and thought of His intelligent and moral creatures. Certainly He is already, by virtue of His Omnipresence, very near each one of us. He is the atmosphere in which we live; "in Him we live, and move, and have our being."[a] But although thus near us in fact, He is remote from our thought. When we try to think constantly of an Infinite Being, Whose Power has no limits, whose Knowledge has no limits, Whose Love has no limits, we soon, if we are trying to attach meaning to our words, find our minds straining more and more despairingly towards the inaccessible. And when doing this, we are sometimes tempted to reject truths which elude the comprehension—I do not say the apprehension—of finite minds, in the vain hope of reaching some truth that, although higher, will be entirely within our grasp. The popular but shallow maxim, that nothing is to be believed which is not perfectly intelligible, cannot be adopted, in the field of religious thought, without grave consequences. They may be noticed in the case of the English Deists. The Deists were engaged in a continuous endeavour, as they would put it, to spiritualize their idea of God, to eliminate from their thoughts about Him all that they could not bring well within the control and compass of the individual reason. They could not really so expand their finite minds as to embrace the Infinite; and they therefore had to go through the experience of some abstract thinkers in the ancient world.

[a] Acts xvii. 28.

Continually sublimating, spiritualizing, their little stock of residuary truth, continually distilling and repeating the process of distillation upon their already meagre idea of God, that idea became at last, at the summit of their thought, so wholly without outline and substance, so rare and thin, as finally to fade and utterly die away into a sublime nonentity beyond, which did not admit of being brought home by words to any human understanding whatever.

And it is to be observed that the greatest stumbling-blocks in the Life of God which Deistic reason has made for itself, have turned not so much upon His Majesty, His Almightiness, His Awfulness, as upon His Love and Condescension. Those who believe in God at all have felt that to say that He was Almighty was the least they could say about Him. But they have been often unwilling to recognize in Him any traces of real Love. They would put up with a passive, unproductive Benevolence, smiling from some corner of the Universe over the tears of a creation which it was too impotent or too sublime to reach. But an active, helping, interfering, practical Love; a Love studying sorrow in detail and assuaging it, or making of it a discipline, that should train men for perfect consolation in the mighty future;—this has Deism ever rejected even with scorn.

No one truth in the Divine Character has been more persistently assailed by the Deists than that of God's special Providence; let us rather say, of His Providence, because, if His Providence is not special, it is practically no providence at all. They have had in their heads, as the ideal to which they would shape their thought of God, the image of some earthly potentate, so occupied with the administration of great affairs of State as to be unable to give thought and time to the wants of

his individual subjects. In the case of a good earthly monarch, this idea of governing capacity might be true enough, simply because man's faculties are limited. Most of us are absorbed either by attention to general principles and laws, or by attention to details and particular circumstances. But the higher we ascend in the scale of human minds, the more clearly do we discern the power of combining attention to general laws with attention to particulars and details; it is in this combination that we find the most fruitful forms of genius. And can we doubt that in the Mind Which is above all minds, there is a consummate, a complete union of these different powers; so that the Author of the most comprehensive laws which govern the movements of the heavenly bodies, does also really number the hairs of our heads,[a] and note each sparrow that falls to the ground,[b] not merely without derogating from His dignity, but in virtue of His Perfection?

Reason itself guides us thus far. Reason resists the notion that it belongs to God's Majesty to be like an Eastern Sultan; powerful to make laws which others will administer, and to produce on a great scale, and by general measures, the happiness or misery of his subjects, but incapable, from the nature of the case, and not merely by reason of his presumed dignity, of entering into the trials and hopes and fears of each of the millions around and beneath him. Still, although right reason resists, our feeble thought finds it difficult to dwell continuously upon a Special Providence, especially under the stress of great sorrows and calamities, so long as all which illustrates it is invisible and abstract; so long as it has no embodiment and expression; so long as nothing meets the soul's eye which enables it to say, "Herein is the Love of God."

[a] St. Matt. x. 30. [b] *Ib.* 29.

It would have been strange if a really living and loving God had implanted in us this yearning for constant and real contact with Himself, and had not satisfied it; strange if He had not reinforced the anticipations of reason, and elevated them into certainties by some gift or interference.

We Christians know that He has done this by becoming "manifest in the Flesh." He has not disappointed the instincts of yearning love which He Himself has given us; He has placed Himself within our reach; He has presented Himself to us under a Form which takes our hearts captive, and which stays,[a] without oppressing, the mind which seeks Him. Nothing in human life makes us so much at home, so surrounds us with all that is most intelligible and tender in our common humanity, as an infant in its cradle. The Christmas message, "Ye shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger,"[b] was the Divine answer to the cry of the human heart, seeking a God Whom it could love, amid the ultimate abstractions of speculation. Henceforward God, while in His Essential Majesty He is necessarily inaccessible to man's understanding, is nevertheless in His Incarnate Life the possession of man's heart. "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given;"[c] "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us."[d]

Let us note two points in conclusion.

Christianity has ever been what it was in the Manger of Bethlehem. It has had two sides; one meeting the bodily eye; another, the eye of faith. To those who have failed to understand its Divine character, the visible, earthly side of Christianity has seemed to be its all.

[a] Isa. xxvi. 3. [b] St. Luke ii. 12. [c] Isa. ix. 6. [d] *Ib.* xxv. 9.

Throughout the ages of Christendom the eye of flesh, if we may so speak, has gazed exclusively at the Infant lying in the Manger; while faith has heard the angels chanting the *Gloria in Excelsis* around their Lord.[a] Look at Christian literature—the Bible most of all. To sight, it is only an interesting collection of histories, and poems, and moral precepts, coming down to us from a long-past age, and entitled on literary grounds to our homage and admiration; but not at all exempt from error, or above criticism. To faith, it is the Word of God, Who has thus unveiled His Mind to His creatures by means of a series of organs of His Will, continued through many ages, until at last He spoke to us in His Son.[b] Look, again, at Christian worship. Natural sight sees in it only the employment of certain words, the observance of particular forms, obedience to a rule which has come down from past ages; the partaking publicly of a little bread and wine; the sprinkling a little water on an infant's brow. To faith, all is lighted up by the sense of His Presence to Whom worship is offered, and apart from Whom it is unmeaning. Its petitions are felt to be addressed to a Living Being; the baptismal Water is "sanctified to the mystical washing away of sin;"[c] the Bread and Wine veil a Saviour present to bless and to save His people. Consider the Christian life. To sight, it is a fussy, unintelligible round of little duties, little observances, little charities, little self-restraints, now and then, upon occasion, rising towards the heroic, but generally trivial, petty, unpretending. To faith, all this detail is but the harmonious language of a soul, expressing, instinctively and loyally, its devotion to the Perfect Moral Being, Who, by creating and redeeming it, has laid it

[a] St. Luke ii. 13, 14. [b] Heb. i. 2.

[c] Public Baptism of Infants.

under an obligation to render Him the homage of continuous love.

And yet that which is outward in Christianity is addressed, not only or chiefly to our senses or natural reason, but also, and especially, to our hearts. Ever since the Everlasting Wisdom of the Father lay in the Manger, "manifest in the Flesh," His religion has been tangible as well as spiritual, popular as well as philosophical. It has had an earthly form as well as a heavenly spirit; it has made provision for affection and imagination as well as for reason and conscience. Its Scriptures have been not merely thought, but poetry; its worship not merely the harmonious movement of souls towards the Invisible and Infinite Being, but the beauty of outward reverence and order; its life, outward duties of love as well as love's inward temper. Men have constantly endeavoured to suppress one side of Christianity in the supposed honour of the other; to ignore its provisions for intellect in order to exalt those which it makes for affection; or to reject the visible ministries and expressions of love, with the object of making religion and worship more spiritual. But Christianity holds on its way, with its twofold character intact, as a Revelation of God, thus manifested in the Flesh, among the scenes of time.

Lastly, by this manifestation of God in the Flesh, the chasm between earth and heaven has been bridged over. A real communication with God, through His Blessed Son, is opened to man. Here is the real greatness of the Festival, which makes it so unlike any other birthday in the world's history. It is not merely an extraordinary anniversary in human affairs; it marks a change in the relations between earth and heaven. The two Natures which, in the Person of the Son of Mary, are inseparably

joined, touch two spheres of Being; there the Uncreated and the Divine; here the created, the dependent, the human. Thus, in virtue of His having these two Natures, "there is One Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus." [a] We lay hold on His pure Manhood, and we are in real communion with Deity. We crowd, by faith, around His Cradle; we accompany Him through His Ministerial Life; we listen to His teaching, His parables, His discourses; we witness His miracles; we follow Him to His Cross, that on us, too, kneeling before Him in our weakness and our sin, there may fall some drops of His cleansing Blood; and all the while we are in truth holding communion with Deity. It is God's perfection, God's example, God's teaching, God's pardoning love, with which we are in contact. Each word, each act of His human life, brings before us some new truth about God's Attributes or His dealings with us. "God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." [b]

This bright festival itself, like the Infant in the Manger, has a human side as well as a Divine. It is an occasion for kindly greetings and courtesies, such as does not recur in the year. It has a joy all its own, some rays of which fall even on those who know nothing of its higher claims upon Christian faith. Let us not despise this lower aspect of Christmas; but let us not overestimate it. Christmas has its true meaning only for those who are leading new lives; for whom God's manifestation in the Flesh is, in their daily thoughts, an event with the importance of which nothing else can possibly compare.

If we thus know anything of the happiness of Christmas, let us turn our knowledge to practical account. We may each of us, on this day of the Kindness and Love of

[a] 1 Tim. ii. 5. [b] 2 Cor. v. 19.

God our Saviour, do some act of kindness in His honour to some one of our poor or suffering brethren. There must be many natural recipients of such bounty known to very many of us; there must be some known to all. There must be some service which all can do in honour of Jesus Christ; all, even the youngest and the poorest. We can give, if not time, then food; if not food, then money, or clothes; we can pay a welcome visit, or offer the sympathy which is needed by those who get little of it. Only let each one in this congregation resolve to do something to-morrow in honour of Jesus Christ, and how much happiness will be diffused! The more we can do, the better. The more cheerfully we can do what we do, the better. Above all, the more unostentatiously we do what we do, the better; since we are doing it in His honour Who for our sakes veiled His Divine Glory beneath a servant's form.[a]

[a] Phil. ii. 7.

SERMON VIII.

THE WORD MADE FLESH.

(CHRISTMAS DAY.)

ST. JOHN I. 14.

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.

CHRISTMAS DAY, we are all agreed, is the greatest birthday in the year. It is the birthday of the greatest Man, of the greatest Teacher of men, of the greatest Benefactor of the human race that ever lived. It is this; but it is also much more. For as on this day was born One Who, while He is truly man, is also and immeasurably more than man.

I.

He Who was born, as on this day, did not begin to be when He was conceived by His human Mother; since He had already existed from before all worlds—from an eternity. His human nature, His human Body, and His human Soul were not, as is the case with us, the whole outfit of His Being; they were, in truth, the least important part of it. He had already lived for an eternity when He condescended to make a human body and a human soul in an entirely new sense His own, by uniting

them to His Divine and Eternal Person; and then He wore them as a garment, and acted through them as through an instrument, during His Life on earth, as He does now in the courts of Heaven. Thus the Apostle says that He "took upon Him the form of a servant,"[a] and that "He took not on Him the nature of angels, but He took on Him the seed of Abraham;"[b] and so the Collect for to-day[c] pleads that He "took our nature upon Him, and was as at this time born of a pure Virgin." And it was in this sense that He became or was made flesh: after having existed from eternity, He united to Himself for evermore a perfect and representative Sample of the bodily and immaterial nature of man, and thus clothed with It, as on this day, He entered into the world of sense and time. "The Word was made flesh, and tabernacled among us."

It is perhaps not surprising that from the early days of Christianity men should have misconceived or misstated what was meant by this central but mysterious truth of the Christian Creed, the Incarnation of the Eternal Son. In truth, the misconceptions about it have been and are many and great.

Sometimes Christians have been supposed to hold that two persons were united in Christ, instead of two natures in His single Person; sometimes that the Infinite Being was confined within the bounds of the finite Nature which He assumed; sometimes that God ceased to be really Himself when He thus took on Him man's nature; sometimes that the Human Nature which He took was absorbed into or annihilated by its union with the Deity. All the chief misconceptions of the true sense of the Apostles have been successively considered and rejected by the Christian Church; and "the right faith is, that we believe

[a] Phil. ii. 7. [b] Heb. ii. 16. [c] Christmas Day.

and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man. God of the substance of His Father, begotten before all worlds, and Man of the substance of His mother, born in the world; perfect God and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His manhood. Who although He be God and man, yet is He not two, but one Christ."[a]

Thus did God the Son take the simple out of the dust and lift the poor out of the mire,[b] when He raised our frail human nature to the incomparable prerogative of union with Himself. So real was and is this union, that all the acts, words, and sufferings of Christ's Human Body, all the thoughts, reasonings, resolves, emotions of His Human Soul, while being properly human, are yet also the acts, words, sufferings, the thoughts, reasonings, resolves, and emotions of the Eternal Son, Who controls all, and imparts to all the value and elevation which belong to the Infinite and the Supreme. Thus, although Christ suffered in His Human Soul in the garden, and in His Human Body on the Cross, His sufferings acquired an entirely superhuman worth and meaning from the Person of the Eternal Word to Whom His Manhood was joined; and St. Paul goes so far as to say that God purchased the Church with His own Blood[c]—meaning that the Blood which was shed by the Crucified was that of a Human Body personally united to God the Son.

It was perhaps inevitable that the question should be asked how such a union of two natures, which differ as the Creator differs from the creature—as the Infinite differs from the finite—was possible. It might be enough to reply that "with God all things are possible;"[d] all things,

[a] Athanasian Creed.
[b] Ps. cxiii. 6.
[c] Acts xx. 28.
[d] St. Matt. xix. 26.

at least, which do not contradict His moral Perfections, that is to say, His essential Nature. And most assuredly no such contradiction can be detected in the Divine Incarnation. But, in truth, it ought not to be difficult for a being possessed of such a composite nature as is man to answer this question; perhaps such a being as man might have been reasonably expected never to have asked it. For what is the Incarnation but the union of two natures, the Divine and the human, in a single Person, Who governs both? And what is man, what are you and I, but samples, at an immeasurably lower level, of a union of two totally different substances; one material, the other immaterial, under the presidency and control of a single human personality? What can be more remote from each other in their properties than are matter and spirit? What would be more incredible, antecedently to experience, than the union of such substances as matter and spirit, of a human body and a human soul, in a single personality? Yet that they are so united is a matter of experience to every one of us. We only do not marvel at it because we are so intimately familiar with it. Day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute, we observe, each within himself, a central authority, directing and controlling, on the one hand, the movements and operations of an animal frame, and on the other the faculties and efforts of an intelligent spirit, both of which find in this central authority or person their point of unity. How this can be we know not. We know not how an immaterial essence can dictate its movements to an arm or a leg, but we see that it does this; and we can only escape from the admitted mystery into difficulties far greater than those which we leave behind, by frankly avowing ourselves materialists, and denying that man has anything that can properly be called a soul, or that he is anything

more than an oddly agitated mass of bones and muscles. If we shrink from this, we must recognize, in the composite structure of our own mysterious being, the means of answering the question about the possibility of the Incarnation. "As the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ."[a] He Who could thus bring together matter and spirit, notwithstanding their utter contrariety of nature, and could constitute out of them a single human personality or being, might surely, if it pleased Him, raise both matter and spirit—a human body and a human soul—to union with His Divinity, under the control of His Eternal Person. Those who have taken even superficially the measure of the twofold nature of man, ought not to find it hard to understand that for sufficient reasons God and man might be united in a single person, or, as St. John says, that the Word might be made flesh, and might dwell among us.

But what, it may be asked, can be conceived of as moving God thus to join Himself to a created form? Is not such an innovation on the associations, if not on the conditions, of His Eternal Being too great to be accounted for by any cause or motive that we can possibly assign for it?

Here we enter a region in which, it need hardly be said, we dare not indulge our own conjectures as to the fitness of things. We do not know enough of the Eternal Mind to presume to account for Its resolves by any suppositions of human origin. If we are to take a single step forward, it must be under the guidance of Revelation. But when men speak of the Incarnation as an innovation on the Eternal Life of God so great as to be beyond accounting for or even conceiving, they forget a still older innovation—if the word may be permitted—about which

[a] Athanasian Creed.

there is, assuredly, no room for doubt. They forget that, after existing for an eternity in solitary blessedness, contemplating Himself and rejoicing in the contemplation, God willed to surround Himself with creatures who should derive their life from Him, and be sustained in it by Him, and should subsist within His all-encompassing Presence, while yet utterly distinct from Him. Creation, surely, was an astonishing innovation on the Life of God; and creation, as we know, involved possibilities which led to much else beyond. If God was to be served by moral creatures endowed with reflective reason, and conscience, and free will, that they might offer Him the noblest, because a perfectly voluntary service, this prerogative dignity necessarily carried with it the possibility of failure; and man, in fact, at the very beginning of his history, did fail. That God should have created at all is, indeed, a mystery; that He should have created a moral world of which He must have foreseen the history, is a still greater mystery; but that, having done this, He—the Eternal Justice, the Eternal Charity—should have left His handiwork to itself, would have been, had it been true or possible, a much greater, and I will add, a much darker mystery. As God must have created out of love,[a] so out of love must He bring a remedy to the ruined creature of His Hands;[b] though the form of the remedy only He could prescribe. We do not know whether there were other ways of raising a fallen race; probably there were, since God is infinite in His resources as in all else. But we may be sure that the way adopted was the best. Of other remedies nothing has been told us. What we do know is the truth of that saying, "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;"[c] what we do confess before God and man is that, "being of one

[a] Jer. xxxi. 3. [b] St. John iii. 16. [c] 1 Tim. i. 15.

substance with the Father, by Whom all things were made, He for us men and for our salvation came down from Heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made Man." [a]

II.

And now, perhaps, some one is asking himself what can be the appropriateness of much that has been said on the afternoon of such a day as Christmas Day. Let us consider.

In the course of his history man has by turns depreciated and exaggerated his true importance among the creatures of God. Sometimes he has made himself the measure of all things, as though his was the sovereign mind, and the Creator a being whose proceedings could be easily understood by him. Sometimes man has appeared to revel in self-depreciation, placing himself side by side with or below the beasts that perish, insisting on his animal kinship with them, and anxiously endeavouring to ignore or deny all that points to a higher element in his life. Sometimes, in a strange spirit of paradox, he has combined theories which ascribe to himself an origin and a nature as degraded as well can be, with passionate assertions of his capacity to judge of all things in earth and Heaven. Just now the depreciatory account of man is the popular one; and we hear echoes of the language which was used on this subject by the early assailants of Christianity. Celsus, the eclectic philosopher who compiled his assortment of objections to the Christian Creed about A.D. 170, insisted once and again that man is not really superior to the more intelligent insects, since bees and ants organize themselves into cities and states under

[a] Nicene Creed.

recognized rulers; they make war upon and peace with each other, and appear to experience the same vicissitudes of fortune if they do not feel the same jealousies and ambitions as human beings.[a] Christianity, according to Celsus and other writers, has made man think too much of his own importance in nature; and some modern successors of Celsus, repeating his estimate of man's place among creatures, go on to call attention to the insignificance of man's dwelling-place. We are reminded that it is no longer possible to think of this earth as the centre of the universe, for the benefit of which the universe exists; as a palace, around which a fair demesne is laid out only with a view to its beauty and requirements; as a comfortable home for the most favoured of God's creatures, to lighten which the sun rises every morning and the stars shine brightly every night. Man can no longer look to the heavens above his head as the spangled roof of the tent in which he dwells; nor can he confidently assume that an eclipse or a conjunction of planets has no other object than to assure him of some secret of his petty destiny. We now know that the planet on which we live is only a smaller satellite of our sun, while this sun itself is but one of thousands of heavenly bodies moving through space in an orbit which it takes vast ages to complete round some still undiscovered centre. We now know that our eye rests on stars the distance of which from this our earth cannot be expressed in figures; stars whose light, flashing with the

[a] Cf. Origen, *Contr. Cels.*, iv. §§ 81, 82; on bees, §§ 83–85. Origen describes Celsus as *ἐπὶ πλεῖον καταβιβάσαι ἀγωνιζόμενος τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένος, καὶ ἐξομοιῶσαι τοῖς ἀλόγοις, καὶ μηδὲν ὅ τι καταλιπεῖν θέλων τῶν ἐν τοῖς ἀλόγοις ἱστορουμένων* (§ 86). But, as Origen observes, whatever the outward similarities between the actions of rational and irrational beings, the source of action was utterly different: *εἰ δ' ἅπαξ βλέπει τὴν πασῶν ὁρμῶν πήγην, δῆλον ὅτι καὶ τὴν διαφορὰν ἴδοι ἂν, καὶ τὴν ὑπεροχὴν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, οὐ μόνον παρὰ τοὺς μύρμηκας, ἀλλὰ καὶ παρὰ τοὺς ἐλέφαντας* (cf. *Ib.*, iv. §§ 23, 24).

speed of light, takes, at the least, even centuries to reach us. As we gaze into the boundless spheres which astronomy thus opens for us, the insignificance of man's dwelling-place becomes increasingly apparent; and as we reflect upon it, it seems to involve and make more and more plain the corresponding and utter insignificance of man.

And this impression about the small worth of human life is deepened by what may be observed of the vicissitudes to which men are exposed, not as individuals, but in masses. A survey of the thousands of dead and dying after a great battle, like Solferino, has for the time being filled men's minds with a painful suspicion that man is too worthless a being to be cared for, and that his lot is controlled by a pitiless and mechanical fate.[a] Every ocean steamship that sinks beneath the waves of the Atlantic with its great freight of human lives; every coal-mine that is the scene of an explosion, whereby scores of families round the pit's mouth are left without their bread-winner; nay, every vast collection of men, such as you may see any day in the streets of London, each one of whom is solitary, unknown, unsympathized with in the great crowd around him—all of these scenes help to deepen the sense of man's pettiness, and so lead a large number of human beings to think of themselves and of others as leaves blown about by the wind of destiny—whither or why who can say?

Of course, apart from Christian faith, there is another side to the matter which nature itself suggests to us. When we look steadily at any one man—the feeblest, the most worthless, as we may think him—we become conscious of his having titles to profound and anxious

[a] This feeling was expressed to the author, when visiting the field of Solferino about a fortnight after the battle, by a Piedmontese soldier who accompanied him, and had himself been nearly killed at Desenzano.

interest. Be his history what it may; his reason, his conscience, his character, cannot be attentively examined without revealing his transcendent importance.

Whatever men may say in their more sombre moods, they do not really believe in all that some philosophers would tell them about the insignificance of man. Consider the diligence with which a trial for murder is followed by thousands of readers of the papers.[a] Here is a man who, before his arrest as a criminal, threaded his way unnoticed through the crowd; one of the leaves, as we are told, which "drifts anywhither before the wind of destiny." But this man is put on trial for his life, and he immediately becomes an object of general interest—of whatever character. If he is really only an animal, whose deeds and whose death are alike ordered by fate; if he have no immortal part in him, and no endless destiny before him; why should the question of life and death be debated more anxiously in his case than in that of an ox or a sheep? Why should the court in which his cause is heard be crowded with listeners; the cross-examination of witnesses scanned with such jealous severity; the words that fall from the presiding judge scrutinized with such anxious attention; the reply of the counsel for the prisoner, the summing-up, the verdict of the jury, all waited for with such hushed yet irrepressible eagerness; the report of the trial read and read again by thousands outside the court who have no personal knowledge either of the victim or of the accused; no personal stake whatever, however remote, in the trial? Do you say that this is to be explained by a widely diffused appetite for all that touches on the confines of the horrible; that a sensation

[a] This was a remark more than once made to me by the late Dr. J. B. Mozley. He thought the "relish for justice" inexplicable apart from belief in the immortality of man.

relieves the monotony of thousands of lives; and that those who do not need this relief are not superior to the instincts of vulgar curiosity? If you say this, you cannot have attentively considered the seriousness—I had almost said the passion—with which a trial for murder is followed by persons who would not on any account give time and attention to cases of another kind. No; men are thus deeply moved because a human life is at stake; because it is a man's destiny that is being weighed in the balance; because it is instinctively felt that much more is in question than the trifle which the fatalism or materialism of some of our modern teachers would allow. At these solemn moments the depreciatory theories of man's nature and origin are forgotten; they give way to a higher and more adequate sense of his real place in the universe. Even the poor prisoner in the dock, who may be guilty of the crime laid to his charge, and on whose countenance, perchance, vice has traced the history of its long and degrading ascendancy; even he for the moment represents the ineffaceable, the indestructible greatness of man. He cannot be sentenced to die without stirring in us all a sense of our true place as immortal beings among the creatures of God; he cannot but command our profoundest interest now that he is bidden test the worth and dignity of his being as he is forced violently across the line that divides the living from those whom we name the dead.

There are, of course, other ways in which men show that they recognize the true dignity of their nature, amidst all its feebleness and degradation. "Men, too, there are," it has well been said, "who, in a single moment of their lives, have shown a superhuman height and majesty of mind, which it would take ages for them to employ on its proper objects, and, as it were, to exhaust; and who,

by such passing flashes like rays of the sun, or the darting of lightning,"[a] give to all around them a sure token of the immense capacities of a human being. But it must be owned that man's judgment about himself, when he is left to himself, rises and sinks with the varying circumstances of his life, with the varying moods of his mind. Left to himself, man has no very solid ground of confidence in any estimate he may form; and he oscillates with timid indecision between grotesque exaggerations and unworthy denials of his real place among the creatures of God. If man was to discover at once the greatness of his needs and the greatness of his capacities, it must be by reference to some standard independent of himself; by the teaching of some event breaking in upon and elevating his collective life, as did the Divine Incarnation. By uniting man's nature for ever to that of the Being Who made him, the Incarnation restored to man his self-respect, while it also made him feel his moral poverty without God, and his utter dependence upon God. But that human nature in which the Eternal Word condescended and condescends to dwell can never be treated by a Christian believer as other than a nature capable of the highest destinies.

Let us contemplate for a moment the Life of our Lord upon earth from this point of view, as the Life Which puts such high and exceptional honour upon human nature.

The moral beauty of which mankind is capable appeared in the earthly Life of Jesus as it never appeared before, as it has never appeared since. Had men invented such a moral portrait, the invention would have been scarcely less a matter for wonder than the reality. But no literary creation could have made so deep and enduring a mark

[a] Newman, *Par. Serm.*, iv. 246.

on generations of human beings as has been made by the Life of Jesus. Yet we can only surrender ourselves to its power upon one condition; we must frankly admit that it is the Life of the Word made flesh no less truly than the Life of the Son of Man. A mere man might have been inspired to say, "Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are they that mourn; blessed are the meek; blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness; blessed are the merciful; blessed are the pure in heart; blessed are the peacemakers; blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake."[a] But no mere man, being humble and veracious, could have said of himself, "I am the Life;"[b] "I am the Light of the world;"[c] "I and the Father are one thing;"[d] "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father;"[e] "No man knoweth the Son but the Father, neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son."[f] Jesus says too much about Himself if He is to be measured by a standard of merely human excellence; if He is only man, we cannot say that all His language is either modest or truthful. All, indeed, falls into its place if He is also the Eternal Son of God; in accepting this central and vital truth we recognize the supreme significance of His Life as that of "God manifest in the flesh."[g] Embrace this truth, and it is not hard to understand now His death on Calvary might avail even for much more than the world's redemption, or how at His Word the weak and poor elements of water and bread and wine might become instruments of spiritual blessings, or veils of a Higher Presence, contact with Which would mean a new life and power for the bodies and souls of men.

Nor does it matter whether such a Life as that of Jesus,

[a] St. Matt. v. 3–10. [b] St. John xi. 25; xiv. 6.
[c] *Ib.* viii. 12. [d] *Ib.* x. 30. [e] *Ib.* xiv. 9.
[f] St. Matt. xi. 27. [g] 1 Tim. iii. 16.

radiant with the beauty and charged with the force of God, was lived on a large sun or on a small planet. The moral world has no relation to the material; the Perfect Moral Being is not impressed, as some of our physicists would seem to be impressed, by mere material bulk. If it is true of God that "He hath no pleasure in the strength of an horse, neither delighteth He in any man's legs,"[a] so it is true that "since the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him," the vastest stars and suns have no particular claim, on account of their size, on His regard. When He would unite Himself to a Human Form, in and through Which to achieve the elevation and redemption of the human family, He chose the scene whence the Divine work would be best achieved; He chose the little planet on which we live; He chose as His birthplace not Rome, not even Jerusalem, but Bethlehem, though it was "little among the thousands of Judah;"[b] He was laid in a rude manger outside the crowded village: He did "not abhor the Virgin's womb."[c]

III.

And therefore Christmas Day is the birthday of the best hopes of man; it is the second birthday of the human family. No other day in the year reminds us more persuasively of the greatness of man; of the greatness, actual or possible, of every human being. Nothing that can be said about man's capacities, or progress, or prerogatives, or rights, approaches even distantly to that which is involved in God's having so loved the human world that He gave His only begotten Son[d] to take our nature upon Him. Already, while He was upon earth, we see

[a] Ps. cxlvii. 10.
[b] Micah v. 2.
[c] The *Te Deum*.
[d] St. John iii. 16.

the meaning of His appearance in the irradiated lives of those around Him. Why is it that poor fishermen, like Peter and Andrew, and peasants like Simon and Jude and James, and tax collectors like Matthew, are far more to us than the great soldiers and statesmen who ruled the Roman world; why is the uncultivated penitent of Magdala infinitely more interesting than the stately ladies who moved amid crowds of prostrate slaves through the halls of the Cæsars? It is because the wonder-working touch of the Word made flesh had already begun to create in these poor country-folk the first samples of a new humanity in which human nature should recover its lost dignity and its lost self-respect; it is because each of them would repeat, from his place in Paradise, the words which one has already written down in the pages of the everlasting Gospel: "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."[a]

Surely Christmas, as the birthday of human greatness, should kindle in us the sense of our true Christian dignity, and nerve us to claim and to protect it by all that guards and invigorates true Christian life. May "the Father of Glory gives us this spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, that the eyes of our understanding being enlightened, we may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe."[b]

And as Christmas Day is the birthday of true human dignity, so it is the birthday of true human brotherhood. Kneeling around the cradle of the Incarnate Word, we may understand that great sentence of His Apostle, that for the new man, renewed after the image of Him that

[a] St. John i. 14. [b] Eph. i. 17–19.

created him, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all and in all." [a] At the manger of Bethlehem, we may dare to look forward, in some coming time, to that union of human lives, of human hearts, of which the noblest of our race again and again have dreamt; to a brotherhood which has sometimes been recommended by abstract arguments, sometimes dictated by revolutionary terrorism, but which to be genuine must be the perfectly free movement of hearts drawn towards each other by a supreme attraction. That attraction we find in the Divine Child of Bethlehem, born that He might redeem and regenerate the world. And all the courtesies and kindnesses of this happy season between members of families, and members of households, and members of the same parish; between the rich and the poor, and the old and the young, and the so-called great and the so-called insignificant, are rightly done in His honour, Who by coming to reveal to us what we may be in Him and through Him, came also to bind us to each other by uniting us to Himself. If still as heretofore the ideal is only too far from being realized; if we hear of sombre jealousies between classes, and of rumours of wars between powerful countries, and of much else at home and abroad that is in opposition to the work which He came to do; let us look to it that, however humble be our place in the scale of moral and spiritual agents, while we linger on this passing scene, we be found among those who have heard to some purpose the angel-song in the meadows of Bethlehem—"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men in whom God is well pleased." [b]

[a] Col. iii. 11.

[b] St. Luke ii. 14, *ἐν ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκίας* (Tisch., App. crit. ed., 8vo).

SERMON IX.

THE INCARNATE GOD WITH MEN.

(SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.)

REV. XXI. 3.

And I heard a great voice out of Heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men.

HERE we have, first, the announcement of a fact, that God has entered into associations of some kind with man of an intimate and special character; more intimate, apparently, than any which exist between Him and the other creatures of His Hand. And secondly, we have here an exclamation of wonder: "The tabernacle of God is with men." The unnamed speaker is probably one of the highest intelligences in Heaven. Angels, greater than we in power and resources, who have never fallen from their first estate, and have freely offered to God through long ages a perfect service, behold God in His unfathomable condescension passing them by, as He bends to help and ennoble the inferior and fallen race of man. They are too pure, these lofty spirits, to harbour the slightest feeling of envy or resentment; but they desire reverently to look into[a] this new revelation of the infinitude of the attributes of their King; they wonder at a condescension

[a] 1 St. Pet. i. 12.

which must be right, but which they cannot understand. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is," not with angels, but "with men!"

And "the tabernacle of God" is itself an expression which may well arrest our attention. It seems to imply a limit to the Illimitable, a local habitation for the Omnipresent. Solomon exclaimed at the dedication of the Temple, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the Heaven and the Heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house that I have builded!"[a] Certainly, when we transfer an expression like this from the associations of our human and finite life to the life of the Divine and Illimitable Being, we must do so with serious reservations, which need hardly be insisted on. To the Arab of the desert, his tent is his covering, his shelter, his home. When a tabernacle is said to be God's, something must be meant which corresponds in some way to our human associations with the expression; but something also widely different from that to which it corresponds. To the Omnipresent, a tabernacle cannot be a covering; it cannot be a shelter to Him Who fills all in all.[b] The expression is of itself startling and paradoxical; and yet it does contain a truth which is not the less worth attention because we may have some difficulty in apprehending it.

Let us, then, reflect on the power which we men have of making our presence emphatic and felt. We know how a man may sit among his fellows, giving little or no token of intelligence and sympathy, watching what passes, hearing what is said, yet making no sign, no intimation of sympathy or even of recognition. And we know how possible is the very reverse of all this; how thought and feeling and resolve may flash forth in coun-

[a] 1 Kings viii. 27. [b] Eph. i. 23.

tenance and in speech, and may profoundly impress, win, subdue, all who come within the limits of a striking human personality. This means that we have the power of accentuating our presence among our fellow-men at will. We do not cease to be present, in our limited way, when we do not thus accentuate it, when we find ourselves in company which throws us back upon our own thoughts, as distinct from company which provokes an expression of what we think and feel. Well, brethren, we are made in God's Image, and therefore it is not irreverent, making all due allowance for the interval which separates the finite from the Infinite, to presume something analogous in Him. He is the Omnipresent: "If I go up into Heaven, Thou art there; if I go down into hell, Thou art there also; if I take the wings of the morning, and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there also shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me."[a] Yes, He is the Omnipresent; but He may surely, if He wills, emphasize His Presence by connecting either its manifestations or its blessings with particular spots, or persons, or actions, or incidents, or edifices, or ordinances. He is the Almighty, and who shall say Him nay? For us His creatures, the only reasonable question can be whether there is reason to think that He has done so. And we do not forget the essential conditions of His Being, because we attribute to Him the exercise of a power which, in an immeasurably lesser degree, He has not denied to ourselves.

"The tabernacle of God," then, is an expression which implies, not that the Presence of the Omnipresent can be limited, but that it can be, for certain purposes, determined and emphasized in a particular direction. And by "the tabernacle of God," St. John here means, imme-

[a] Ps. cxxxix. 7–9.

diately, the New or Heavenly Jerusalem. In the course of his great vision, the Last Judgment is now over. Earth and Heaven have fled away from the Face of Him That sitteth on the Throne. In their place is displayed a new Heaven and a new earth. Out of this new Heaven, "the holy city, new Jerusalem, comes down from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."[a] The Church triumphant is thus called a city, just as our Lord had termed the Church of the Apostles "a city set on a hill;"[b] just as the Church triumphant is said in the Epistle to the Hebrews to be "a city that hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God,"[c] and a continuing city[d] which we have not here, but seek as yet to come. As St. John sees this city descending from Heaven; he hears a great voice out of the Throne, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men!" This tabernacle, then, is the Heavenly Jerusalem itself, the gathered millions of the redeemed in the realms of glory. But lest the metaphor should mislead, and make us think of material architecture instead of spiritual essences, the triumphant Church is also compared to a bride adorned for her husband. Within the precincts of this sacred city,—to the heart of this immaculate spouse,—God deigns to discover and manifest His essential Being with an unparalleled splendour. He vouchsafes to establish a transcendent relation between Himself and His servants now perfected in glory, of which our poor human language about the tabernacle which protects and enshrines a manifestation of the Sacred Presence affords some distant hint. And thus, as the millions of the glorified adoringly throng around, the words have become true, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men!"

[a] Rev. xxi. 2.
[b] St. Matt. v. 14.
[c] Heb. xi. 10.
[d] *Ib.* xiii. 14.

As we dwell on these wonderful words, we see in them the final term of a long process, which has taken ages to reach its end. The union of God with man is at last completed. It is complete and indissoluble; and with it all for which man craves is more than realized.

What, my brethren, is the deepest desire of our natures? What is the secret of that unappeasable restlessness of the human heart which no created object can allay? It is the implanted longing for God. "Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after Thee, O God."[a] Not merely a desire to know God: knowledge of the unattainable may be only torture. Not merely a desire to be purified for the sight of God. But a desire to be really united with Him; nay, a hope "that we may evermore dwell in Him, and He in us."[b] When the soul which the Infinite Being has created for Himself finds itself one with Him, its deepest instinct is perfectly satisfied, and it is at peace.

Now, the realization of this implanted hope of the soul of man was first shadowed out and then provided for. God has tabernacled among men, first intermittently and distantly, in Israel; then by actual union with humanity, in the Incarnation; lastly in the Society which sprung from this union—the Holy Catholic Church.

I.

"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men!" This might have been said of the sacred tent, of which we read so much in the Books of Moses, and which was the centre of the worship of Israel until the building of the Temple. It is the "tabernacle of the congregation"

[a] Ps. xlii. 1.

[b] Prayer of Humble Access in the Service of Holy Communion.

as our Version renders the original words, or, more accurately, "the tabernacle of meeting." This solemn phrase implied, not a house in which men would meet together to talk or hear about God, but a house in which God would meet His people. Consider the words in which the law of the continual burnt offering concludes: "This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the Lord: where I will meet you, to speak there unto thee. And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by My glory. . . . And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God." [a]

Thus this tabernacle was to be in some way the veil or accompaniment of a Presence. God would hold His court in it, or at it; there He would instruct His servants; there He would meet Israel. And the history of the people of Israel abundantly illustrates what was practically meant. With the tabernacle was closely associated a "cloud," or a "pillar of cloud," [b] as the visible symbol of the Divine Presence. From it proceeded the guidance, the warning, the judgment, which might be needed for Israel. When Aaron and Miriam rebelled against Moses, "the Lord came down in the pillar of cloud and stood in the door of the tabernacle," and rebuked them, and smote Miriam with leprosy. [c] When the seventy elders were set by Moses round about the tabernacle, "the Lord came down in a cloud and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that was upon him, and gave it to the seventy elders, and they prophesied." [d] When, on the return of the spies, the disappointed Israelites proposed to stone Joshua and Caleb, "the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle

[a] Exod. xxix. 42–45.
[b] *Ib.* xiii. 21, 22.
[c] Numb. xii. 5, 10.
[d] *Ib.* xi. 25.

of meeting before all the children of Israel. And the Lord said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke Me?"[a] When the rebellious Korah gathered all the congregation of Israel against Moses and Aaron to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, "the glory of the Lord appeared unto all the congregation. And the Lord said unto Moses and Aaron, Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment."[b] When the people murmured in Meribah at the want of water, the glory of the Lord appeared to Moses and Aaron at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.[c] It was to this Sacred Presence that the case of the daughters of Zelophahad was referred for decision;[d] it was hence that, on the eve of the death of Moses, the solemn charge was given to Joshua.[e]

This pillar of the cloud, with which God associated such remarkable manifestations of His Presence, was also the guide of Israel in the desert.[f] It was dark by day, and bright by night. It rested ordinarily on the tabernacle. While the cloud rested, for however long a period, the people remained where they were. When the cloud moved, every Israelite prepared to begin to march. The sacred tent on which the cloud rested was in the centre, whether of the stationary or moving multitude. Closest to it were the Levites, the body-guard of their unseen Master; and then at a greater distance, but in prescribed order, the other tribes.

Nor was the cloud by any means the only association of the tabernacle with the Presence of God. Within the tabernacle was the sacred breastplate of the High Priest; the Urim and Thummim, through which the Divine Will was communicated to devout inquirers. And in the

[a] Numb. xiv. 10, 11. [b] *Ib.* xvi. 19–21. [c] *Ib.* xx. 1–8.
[d] *Ib.* xxvii. 1–11. [e] Deut. xxxi. 14. [f] Numb. ix. 15–22.

holiest recess of the tabernacle was the Sacred Ark, containing the two Tables of the Law, and, in early days, the pot of Manna and the rod of Aaron. The Ark was covered by the mercy-seat; the symbol of the Divine Compassion putting out of sight human transgressions of the Moral Law. Above the Ark were the winged cherubim, representatives of the highest created life, as though bending to adore the moral revelation of the Self-existent, which the contents of the Ark enshrined. We cannot exaggerate the importance of the position of the two Tables of the Law. It marked off in the eyes of Israel, as sharply as was possible, God's revelation of Himself as Righteousness, from other Eastern conceptions of Him, as some force or productive energy of Nature. Here, then, was the central scene of the Presence vouchsafed in the tabernacle, which made it, as the Psalmist says, "the tent which God had pitched among men."[a] Above the Ark was the Shekinah—the Divine glory, the centre-point of worship in primitive Israel.

The tabernacle lasted till it had ceased to be the tabernacle of God. When it was fixed at Shiloh during the days of the Judges, it was surrounded by, and probably in the people's eyes associated with, the impure worship of Ashtaroth. God withdraws a Presence which is desecrated by man. The Ark was taken by the Philistines; the sanctuary was bereft of the Divine glory. Then, at the massacre of the Priests and the flight of Abiathar, it lost the Urim and Thummim. The new tabernacle in Jerusalem, which preceded the Temple, had not all the distinctions of the old. The tabernacle of God, with its high prerogatives, of which we read in the Pentateuch, was no longer with men.

The Presence in the tabernacle was undoubtedly a

[a] Ps. lxxviii. 60.

localized Presence; a particular determination of His Presence Whose Being knows no bounds. But the tabernacle had no necessary or inseparable relation to the Presence Which it for awhile enshrined. Its relation to the Presence was provisional; it did its work for the people of Revelation, and it passed away.

II.

"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men!" At this season of the year, with the anthems of Christmastide still ringing in our ears, we can be at no loss for a deeper meaning of the words. The sacred Manhood of our Lord Jesus Christ, His Body and His Soul, became, by the Incarnation, the tabernacle of God. Almighty God gave us His only begotten Son to take our nature upon Him, and, as at this time, to be born of a pure Virgin.[a] The Son, Which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, Very and Eternal God, took man's nature upon Him in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, of her substance, so that two whole and perfect Natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in One Person, never to be divided.[b] The Son had existed from eternity; and then He wrapped around His Eternal Person, and indissolubly, a human Body and a human Soul. When we Christians say that Jesus Christ is Divine, we do not mean that, being originally only a human being, He was eventually so richly endowed with the moral attributes of Love, Justice, Truthfulness, Sanctity, which make up the essential Life of God, as to become unlike and superior to any other known man. When we say that Jesus Christ is Divine, we mean that, being Very and Eternal

[a] Collect for Christmas Day. [b] Art. II.

God, He took our nature upon Him. He took it for a vesture which, as our Representative, He would wear for ever on the Throne of Heaven. He took it as a created form in which He would become capable of suffering pain, and which He might offer, as a sinless Victim, to the Eternal Purity. He took it as a medium or instrument through which He might act upon mankind; through which He would approach us in our human language; through which He would enrich us by contact with it, as being the Source of higher than human strength. "The Word," says St. John, "was with God, and the Word was God."[a] "And the Word was made Flesh, and tabernacled among us."[b] This Human Body and Soul were the tabernacle in which He, the Eternal Word and Son, deigns to dwell, not for thirty-three years only, but for ever. And thus, while men looked on a human countenance and heard human language, and noted the circumstances of a human life, and asked, "Is not this the carpenter's Son, and is not His mother called Mary?"[c]—as though nothing could be plainer—He, on the other hand, could say, without a trace of exaggeration, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father;"[d] "Before Abraham was, I am;"[e] "I and the Father are One Thing."[f]

It is this which makes the Gospels unlike any other books, even any other inspired books. They describe a Life utterly unlike any other life that ever was lived on earth. It is the Life of the Divine Being making human nature His tabernacle, dwelling on earth in human form. The first three Gospels lay stress on the Human Nature; the fourth on the Divine, which was veiled and yet manifested by the Human. But they all describe

[a] St. John i. 1. [b] *Ib.* 14. [c] St. Matt. xiii. 55.
[d] St. John xiv. 9. [e] *Ib.* viii. 58. [f] *Ib.* x. 30.

One Who, living among men, was infinitely more than man, since His Manhood was the tabernacle of God.

There are those who say with us that the tabernacle of God has been and is with men, but who deny the particular Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, on the ground that this limits the privilege to a single Individual. "God is Incarnate," says Schelling, "in the race of mankind; nothing less than humanity at large is the true tabernacle of the Eternal; and Christians are mistaken, not in their conception of an Incarnation of God, but in the restriction which they impose on it."

Here, as so often, Pantheism shows itself incapable of appreciating that jealous anxiety to guard the moral character of God, which is characteristic of the Christian Creed. The God Whom we Christians worship is powerful and wise; but He is especially, and before all things, holy. He does not say to us, "Be ye strong, for I am the Almighty;" or, "Be ye wise, for I am wise;" but, "Be ye holy, for I am holy."[a] And when the intelligences of Heaven praise Him in the Threefold Unity of His Life, and name the attribute which it most concerns His creatures to have in mind, they cry not, "Almighty, Almighty, Almighty!" or "All-wise, All-wise, All-wise!" but "Holy, Holy, Holy!"[b]

To identify God with that moral evil which is the deepest contradiction of His Essence, is in Christian eyes blasphemy. And yet this is what is done, if we conceive of Him as incarnate in the race of man at large. For an incarnation does identify as intimately as possible the being who assumes a nature other than his own, with the nature which he thus assumes; and if God is really incarnate in humanity at large, He has robed Himself, not merely in its glories, its beauties, its virtues, its

[a] 1 St. Pet. i. 16. [b] Isa. vi. 3.

genius, its almost infinitely varied attractiveness, but also in its weaknesses, its degradations, and its crimes. If this be so, it was God Who murdered Abel; it was He Whose corruptions were swept away by the flood; it was He Who lusted in Sodom, and oppressed in Egypt, and covered the land with abominations in Canaan, and murmured against His own appointments in the desert; and Saul, and Jeroboam, and Ahab, and Antiochus, and Judas, and Herod, and Nero, and Elagabalus, and many another crowned or uncrowned ruffian, are not sinners whom He condemns, but interesting forms of the activity of His all-pervading Life, manifested in the moral eccentricities of the human family. This, indeed, is an extraordinary robe to be fitted indissolubly and for ever to the Nature of Him Who, if He does not belie the noblest instincts which He has given us, as well as the express terms of His own Revelation of Himself, "is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity."[a] No, brethren, God could not be incarnate in this race, as a race, to which you and I belong, without sanctioning, by the approbation of most intimate companionship, that which is to Him hateful beyond our powers of thought to conceive. If He would unite Himself with us by taking our nature upon Him, while yet respecting His own unalterable Perfections, He must, in the very act of assuming it, so isolate the human flesh and blood, the body and soul which He deigns to make His own, that it shall retain nought of the taint of corruption which for ages has attached to human nature; that, although of the true stock of human kind, it shall be pure "even as He is pure."[b] And this isolation of a Manhood one with that of the fallen race, yet unlike it in being absolutely sinless, was secured by our Lord's supernatural Birth of a Virgin-Mother. That Birth was no mere enrichment of a deeply

[a] Hab. i. 13. [b] 1 St. John iii. 3.

interesting story, with a superfluous appendage of the picturesquely marvellous; it was an essential condition of or factor in the process, whereby God was to tabernacle really but worthily among men in human form, that thereby man might be redeemed and sanctified. It was His manifestation in such guise that the Evangelist writes, "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."[a]

III.

"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men!" This is true, in a different sense, of the Church of Christ, in which Christ designs to dwell throughout the Christian ages. He has kept, He is still keeping, His promise: "Lo, I am with you all days, even unto the end of the world."[b]

He has been with us for more than eighteen centuries. His Church is an outflow of His Incarnate Life; it is an extension of His Incarnation into human history. For the Church is an aggregate of Christian lives, and each living Christian is a product and extension of the life of Christ. "As He is, so are we in this world."[c] "Christ in you, the Hope of glory."[d] There is more in a Christian's life, as there was more in our Lord Jesus Christ, than meets the eye. A Christian's thought is supplied, enriched, controlled, by a Book in which human words veil the Mind of the Eternal. His intellect is illuminated, his affections expanded, his will invigorated, his whole nature first renewed and then sustained and developed by a force which Christendom knows as grace, and which flows forth from the sinless Manhood of the Incarnate Christ, at the bidding of His Spirit, through sacramental channels which

[a] St. John i. 14.
[b] St. Matt. xxviii. 20.
[c] 1 St. John iv. 17.
[d] Col. i. 27.

He has appointed to conduct it to the souls and bodies of the faithful. All is hidden from the senses; but as He blesses the water in our fonts, and veils Himself beneath the bread and wine on our altars, we recognize One Who emptied Himself of His glory, and took on Him the form of a slave, and was made in the likeness of man." [a]

Still, although Christ is thus with His Church, and she is the tabernacle which He has pitched in the wide field of humanity, she is composed of weak and sinful men, and is thus liable to be out of correspondence with the perfect Manhood in Which His Godhead tabernacled on earth, and by Which He still dwells within her. Now, as at the first, the Gospel net brings up bad fish as well as good.[b] Now as always, tares grow in the sacred field side by side with the wheat.[c] Now, as in St. Paul's day, men build wood, hay, and stubble, worthless material of their own procuring, upon the one Divine Foundation.[d] In most ages of the Church she has had Judas [e] and Diotrephes [f] among her pastors and rulers; and Ananias and Sapphira,[g] and Alexander the coppersmith,[h] and Euodias and Syntyche,[i] among her people. The Bride of the Lamb is not yet prepared for the Bridegroom's welcome. The tabernacle of the Church, in which Christ dwells on earth, is soiled and torn; it could not be translated, in its present condition, to the courts above. He Who dwells in it must first repair, purify, embellish it.

IV.

"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men!" Here, then, we reach St. John's point of view in the vision

[a] Phil. ii. 7. [b] St. Matt. xiii. 47. [c] *Ib.* 24-30.
[d] 1 Cor. iii. 11. [e] St. Matt. xxvi. 14, 15. [f] 3 St. John 9.
[g] Acts v. 1-10. [h] 2 Tim. iv. 14. [i] Phil. iv. 2.

of the Apocalypse. In the Apocalypse God is tabernacling among the just made perfect. All that was needed for this has been accomplished, by sufferings on earth, perhaps by long waiting and discipline, or by the sifting fire of the judgment. And thus the All-holy dwells, not merely in the Body Which He took of Mary, but also, in another sense, in the glorified Church of His living members, without spot and blameless.

That is the goal for which we are working; that is the perfect realization of the saying which sounded in St. John's ears from beneath the Throne. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." [a]

Such words as these it is surely well to keep constantly in mind, when we are again about to pass one of those sign-posts which mark the close of a division of this our fleeting life. Within forty-eight hours the year 1883 will have gone for ever, leaving its records of good or evil in the books of the Eternal Justice; and we shall have entered upon its successor. There have been more eventful years than this which is passing; more eventful in the history of our country and of the Church of Christ. Dangers which looked threatening twelve months ago are less threatening now; and blessings which then seemed of doubtful value are better appreciated, as we have had time to examine and to test them. Churchmen must think of the year which is closing, as presenting a contrast to its predecessor in the small number of those

[a] Rev. xxi. 3, 4.

who have been taken from us by death. Two names there are which deserve especial and reverent mention; the late Archdeacon of Dublin,[a] venerable alike for his high personal character, his wide theological accomplishments, and his loyalty to the faith of the Church amid wide-spread defection; and a prebendary of this Cathedral,[b] whose learning and thoughtfulness made him in many ways a blessing to his generation. For the rest, some hopes which seemed faint have grown stronger, and some fears which were anxious have grown happily less; and if there are some darker touches in the picture, they do not overpower its brighter hues.

But whatever be the aspect of public affairs, each of us knows how it is with his own life, now that we have drawn one year nearer to our last account. Nor can we well be insensible to the fact that there are forces at work in the world of thought and in the world of action which no thinking man can contemplate without misgiving. At the base of the social edifice, and in its most cultivated circles, the faith of Christ, or even the existence of God, is denied with a deliberation, with a publicity, with a persistency, unknown before since England has been Christian. Let those who will persuade themselves that destructive speculation like this can be encouraged without grave results on human life; that wild and blasphemous theories will never be translated into a practical policy; that codes of conduct which lack the elementary basis and sanction of any serious morality will always be treated as waste paper. Such is not the verdict of experience. Behind these forms of thought, or intimately allied with them

[a] The Venerable William Lee, D.D., Archdeacon of Dublin, died May 13, 1883.

[b] The Rev. W. J. Irons, D.D., Prebendary of St. Paul's, and Rector of St. Mary Woolnoth, died June 18, 1883.

there hover, already, projects of change, in which good and evil elements are strangely mingled. Generous efforts to improve the material condition of the people go hand in hand with wild dreams of redistributing property, in obedience to economical theories which are at issue with the plainest facts of nature and life, as also to instincts and passions which will always be powerful while man bears within him the impress of the Fall. Let us never forget that, by tabernacling in our nature, Jesus Christ has ennobled every human being; that the debt which we His servants owe to our fellow-men is never paid off; but let us also be sure that no theory which tampers with a truth of the Eternal Moral Law can be other than dishonourable to Him, and injurious to all who seriously entertain it.

Indeed, as to this and other matters, the best hope that can be formed for the future lies in the propagation and strengthening among men of a living faith in the Incarnate Christ. No other faith enables us to do such justice to the rights of man; no other faith teaches us so clearly how man's true nobility is bound up with his loyalty to moral truth. No faith like this links us to the past, since in Him the dead and the living are one; no faith so enables us to look forward hopefully to the future, since we know Who is guiding us, and what, at His bidding, we hope and mean. For nations as for Churches, for individuals no less than for societies, faith in our Incarnate Lord is the warrant alike of stability and of improvement. Whatever else may change in this changeful world, Christians are well assured that He Who took our nature upon Him is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."[a] For us He bridges over the chasm between earth and Heaven which to others seems im-

[a] Heb. xiii 8

passable; for us He affords a warrant of hope and confidence where others see only the deepening gloom of an advancing night. Only may we have heart and grace to remember that union with the Son of Mary is the one thing needful; and that it is better to be "a doorkeeper in the House of God, than to dwell in the tents of ungodliness." [a]

[a] Ps. lxxxiv. 10.

SERMON X.

THE FIRST MARTYR.

(SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS: FEAST OF ST. STEPHEN.)

ACTS VII. 60.

And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

THIS was the close of the last scene in a brief but great career. Stephen, the first of Christian Deacons, the first of Christian Martyrs, had said his last word, had heaved his last sigh, and, as far as this world was concerned, all was over. "He fell asleep." Death, which can never for any human being be meaningless, was in his case marked by the highest significance; for, as he breathed his last outside the walls of Jerusalem, he, first among the worshippers of Christ, completed the new ideal of life which our Lord had given to the world. "He fell asleep." It was, I say, a solemn and triumphant moment, not for himself only, but for his associates and his country; for the future of the Church of God.

I.

Let us recall what the author of the Acts of the Apostles tells us about him. Stephen was originally a

Hellenistic Jew. The Hellenistic Jews were made up, partly of men of purely Gentile parentage, who were proselytes to the Mosaic Law, and partly of Jews, who, by long settlement in foreign lands, had adopted the language and manners of Greek civilization. To say that a man was a Hellenist proved nothing as to his descent. But it showed that he accepted the religion of Israel, while yet he used Greek speech and followed Greek customs. Stephen's name, although Greek, does not exclude the possibility of his having been a Jew by birth; and he is said to have had a Syriac name of the same meaning. Of his conversion to the Faith of Christ we know nothing; he is first mentioned when he was chosen one of the seven Deacons. The Church of Jerusalem, you will remember, in the earliest Apostolic age, had a common fund, into which its members at their conversion threw their personal property, and out of which they were assisted according to their needs. The administration of this fund must have come to be a serious and complicated business within a few months from its establishment. And as the higher ministries of the Church were ordained, not with a view to carrying on a work of this kind, but for the conversion and sanctification of souls, it was natural that, with the demands upon their time which the Apostles had to meet, the finance and resources of the Church should occasionally fall into confusion. So it was that, before many months had passed, "there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews"—that is, of the Hellenistic against the Jewish converts—"because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration."[a] Probably these widows or their friends may have been somewhat exacting. But the Apostles felt that their time ought not to be spent in

[a] Acts vi. 1.

managing a bank. The Twelve, who were all still in Jerusalem, assembled the whole body of the faithful, and desired them to elect seven men "of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom,"[a] to be entrusted, as Deacons, with the administration of the funds of the Church. Seven persons were chosen; and at their head Stephen, described as "a man full of the Holy Ghost and of faith."[b] These seven were ordained by laying on of the Apostles' hands, just as Deacons are ordained in the Church of Christ at this hour; and the result of this arrangement was that "the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the" Jewish "priests were obedient unto the faith."[c]

Of St. Stephen's exertions in the organization and direction of the public charity we hear nothing; although we may be sure that this was not neglected. We are told, however, that he was "full of faith and power," and that he "did great wonders and miracles among the people."[d] No details are given; but his miracles must not be forgotten in our estimate of the causes of his success. His chief scene of labour seems to have been in the synagogue, or group of synagogues, "of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia."[e] The Libertines were Jews who had been taken prisoners, reduced to slavery, then enfranchised by the Roman general Pompey. Many of them had recently been banished from Rome, and would naturally have had a synagogue to themselves in Jerusalem. At least one synagogue would have belonged to African Jews from Cyrene and Alexandria; and two or three others to the Jews of Cilicia and Asia Minor. These were a very numerous class, and among them the future Apostle

[a] Acts vi. 3. [b] *Ib.* 5. [c] *Ib.* 7.
[d] *Ib.* 8. [e] *Ib.* 9.

of the Gentiles was at this date still reckoned an enthusiastic Pharisee. It was among these Jews from abroad that Stephen opened, what we should call, a mission; he had more points of contact with these men of Greek speech and habits than had the Twelve. He engaged in a series of public disputations; and although he was almost unbefriended, and represented a very unpopular cause, his opponents "were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit with which he spake."[a] But the victory which they could not hope to win by argument, they hoped they might win by denunciation and clamour. They persuaded some false witnesses to swear that in their hearing Stephen had spoken blasphemous words against Moses and against God.[b] They combined against him the jealousy of the upper classes and the prejudices of the lower; and they brought him, on trial for blasphemy, before the highest Jewish court—the Sanhedrin.[c]

Every one of us, probably, if we only knew it, has some one work which God means us especially to do before we die. What that work is we do not know at the time; we cannot, each of us for himself, see our lives spread out like a map, so as to discern the relative importance of their several incidents. But if we could see things as God sees them, we should probably know that in the Divine predestination all leads up to, or radiates from, some one work or some one sorrow; and if we do not also know which this is, it is that we may throw our whole heart and energy into everything, lest perchance we should fail at the critical moment. But, looking back, we can perceive clearly in St. Stephen's case that which we may be unable to see in our own. The great work of Stephen's life was the speech he made in his defence before the council. It took him perhaps half an hour, or rather

[a] Acts vi. 10. [b] *Ib.* 11. [c] *Ib.* 12–14.

more, to make; but its effects are very far indeed from having spent themselves now, at a distance of eighteen centuries. In that speech Stephen tacitly admits that he had impugned the Jewish belief about the Temple. In his review of Jewish history, he shows that the Presence of God had not in past centuries been confined to the Jewish Temple or to the Holy Land; that Mesopotamia, Egypt, Midian, Sinai, had been favoured by heavenly visions;[a] that ages had passed before the Temple was built;[b] and that after it was built prophets like Isaiah[c] had taught the lesson of a world-wide worship, as our Lord had taught it to the woman of Samaria.[d] Stephen further points out how the same bitter spirit which was persecuting him to death had been the curse of the Jewish people at all stages of their history;[e] how they had rebelled against their greatest benefactors, even against Moses;[f] how, even in the wilderness, they, the guardians of the one Revelation, had neglected the true worship of God.[g] His audience, probably, at first listened in contemptuous silence to language which they regarded as the ravings of a fanatic, or as an uninteresting historical dissertation of which they had not understood the drift. But now they began to see what he really meant. He was speaking, not merely of the past, but of the present; of all that had happened in Jerusalem and on Mount Calvary in the spring of that very year. Like their forefathers, Stephen said, his hearers too, resisted the Holy Ghost.[h] The Jews of earlier generations had persecuted the prophets who foretold the Just One. The Jews of this generation had murdered the Just One Whom the prophets foretold.[i]

[a] Acts vii. 2, 9, 10, 29, 30, 38. [b] *Ib.* 47.
[c] *Ib.* 48, 49; cf. Isa. lxvi. 1. [d] St. John iv. 21. [e] Acts vii. 51, 52.
[f] *Ib.* 27, 28, 39, 40. [g] *Ib.* 41, 42. [h] *Ib.* 51. [i] *Ib.* 52.

At this point their impatience knew no bounds. "They were cut to the heart, and gnashed upon him with their teeth."[a] As their countenances gathered blackness, and the storm of wild passion rose around him in surging fury, Stephen knew that his work was done. But before he left the court he spoke one last word. He looked upwards, and lo! at that supreme moment, the higher world was opened to his gaze in all its bliss and splendour. The glory of God—nay, Jesus Himself—was visible. Jesus was not seated in His wonted majesty on the Throne of Heaven; He was standing, as if to assist His suffering servant. And Stephen, in his ecstasy, described what he saw. "Behold, I see the Heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God."[b] "The Son of Man." It was the familiar designation of our Lord, which He had used of Himself so constantly, but which, here only in the New Testament, is used of Him by any of His servants. It brought back with unwelcome vividness the language and presence of the Crucified to the minds of His judges. Here was a disciple who claimed to see the Crucified in the realms of Glory. It was more than they could bear. Stephen knew that his work was done, and that a sterner scene must follow.

They would listen no longer. They "stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city."[c] They were too angry to reflect that the vengeance they meditated required the sanction of the Roman government. They could not wait for a doubtful verdict. Stephen must die at once, as the Law ordered that a blasphemer should die.[d] The wild rush of the mob, judges, populace, witnesses, and their victim, through the temple enclosure, to the gate hard by, was

[a] Acts vii. 54. [b] *Ib.* 56.
[c] *Ib.* vii. 57. [d] Lev. xxiv. 16.

soon accomplished. And now they were outside the city, on the hill-slope facing the Mount of Olives. There was a pause, during which the witnesses who had denounced him, and who were bound, by the Mosaic Law,[a] to take the lead in his execution, stripped themselves that they might the better perform their dreadful task. A young man named Saul undertook to guard their clothes; and then the work of death began. As the stones fell thick and heavily upon the Martyr, he entreated our Lord, Whom he had just seen in glory, to receive his spirit. Another volley followed, and another prayer—the last—was uttered; in the spirit of the first of the Seven Words upon the Cross: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."[b] All was over. To the eye of sense it seemed a hideous butchery, in which a pure and noble life was crushed out of a young man by horrible torture. But, as Stephen sank in death upon the ground, the Bible only says, "When he had said this, he fell asleep."

II.

Let us endeavour to gather up one or two of the lessons of St. Stephen's life and death.

1. St. Stephen is, first of all, remarkable as a Christian teacher of original power; he consecrates, beneath the eyes of the Apostles, the gift of religious originality.

"Religious originality" is a phrase that may be easily misunderstood or abused. There is, for instance, no room for such original treatment of religion, as would be the case if the Faith were a work of imagination, so that its subject-matter could be changed or modified at the pleasure of an individual artist. A Revelation, if

[a] Deut. xiii. 9; xvii. 7. [b] Acts vii. 60.

it is worthy of its name, comes from God. God warrants the trustworthiness of its contents, of its substance. Into this sphere man cannot obtrude anything of his own without being guilty of something much worse than impertinence. Any addition to that which God has said is so much foreign matter, which is no part of the Revelation at all. In the plain and honest language of the earliest Christendom, a man who should invent new doctrines, or should deny old ones, would have been called a heretic; he would have been condemned as purely mischievous, and would have commanded no admiration whatever on the score of his originality. If, of course, there were, properly speaking, no such thing as a Revelation from God; if all Christian Faith, in the last analysis, should prove to be the product of the fancy or of the speculations of gifted men; then we of to-day might very well hope to improve upon the New Testament and the Creeds; and there would be plenty of scope for creative originality. But as it is, the old precepts still hold: "Ye shall not add unto the Word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it;" [a] "Add not thou unto the Words [of God], lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar;" [b] "Though we, or an angel from Heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed;" [c] "It was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the Faith which was once delivered unto the Saints." [d]

But although nothing can be added to or changed in a Faith which comes to us on the authority of God, there is scope for originality in the way of apprehending and presenting it, and in the relative prominence which is given to different features of it. In these ways, while it

[a] Deut. iv. 2. [b] Prov. xxx. 6. [c] Gal. i. 8. [d] St. Jude 3.

is itself unchanging, the Divine message takes a colour or flavour from the different minds that transmit it. The great teachers of the Christian Church have constantly been in this sense original. Augustine and Chrysostom taught the same truth, but they respectively presented it in different lights to their Western and Eastern hearers. Nay, the inspired Apostles themselves—St. Peter, St. James, St. John, and St. Paul—preaching, as they did, the same Gospel, laid emphasis upon different elements of the common truth which they preached. And in this sense, although under an unerring and heavenly guidance, each of them was original; each delivered the common message after a form and fashion peculiar to himself. And as this holds good of many great teachers of later times, so it is peculiarly true of St. Stephen.

St. Stephen did not preach any other gospel than that which St. Peter and St. John had been preaching ever since the Day of Pentecost. But his originality consisted in the prominence which he gave to an element in the common Faith, upon which as yet, judging from the reports in the Acts of the Apostles, the chiefs of the Church do not appear to have insisted. Stephen, as we have seen, maintained that the Divine favour and Presence was no longer to be identified with the Jewish Temple and the Jewish Ritual; and this was what his enemies meant by saying that he had spoken "against this holy place and the Law."[a] Up to this date, the Christians in Jerusalem had largely, although not exclusively, resorted to the Temple for their public worship; those old rites and that world-famed sanctuary had a fascination which we cannot now even distantly comprehend. Stephen saw that in the words of Christ there lay the promise, not of a Jewish sect, but of a world-wide or Catholic

[a] Acts vi. 13.

Church, and that, if this was to be realized, the local, transient, imperfect character of the Temple-worship must be steadily insisted on. Our Lord had said, "I am the Light of the world."[a] He had said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature."[b] The Apostles knew and believed His words. But Stephen detached the import of these words from the rest of our Lord's teaching; he gave it commanding prominence; he secured for it high and immediate practical importance, by applying it to the existing circumstances of the Church in Jerusalem. And thus he produced a profound impression; hostile as well as friendly and sympathetic. It was this element in his teaching which led to his death. It was this element of his teaching which made him—little as he knew it—the forerunner and, to use the phrase of St. Basil, the "master" of St. Paul. Saul of Tarsus did much more than keep the clothes of the witnesses at the martyrdom; he would almost certainly have heard the speech before the Sanhedrin; he would probably have taken part in the public disputations in the Cilician synagogue. Thence we may trace the germ of the characteristic doctrines of his great Epistles; of the insufficiency of the Mosaic Law; of the freedom of Divine grace; of the world-wide universality of the Christian Church; of the passing away of the old things of the Jewish covenant, because in Christ "all things had become new."[c]

Let us learn to distinguish, brethren, between originality and invention. In the things of God, invention is profane. But, in the case of an earnest mind, some kind or degree of originality is well-nigh inevitable. Each mind, to which Divine Truth is a serious reality, apprehends that truth in its own peculiar way, according to

[a] St. John viii. 12. [b] St. Mark xvi. 15. [c] 2 Cor. v. 17.

the drift and guidance of its individual needs. A sincere hold on Truth is scarcely consistent with an entire absence of peculiarities in the mode of holding and presenting it. When it is real to a man, he feels towards it and describes it as it strikes him and nobody else; and this, his way of regarding it, as distinct from whatever it is in itself, is the proper province of religious originality.

2. St. Stephen was a man of great force of character, of great practical capacity. As such he was chosen to be one of the seven Deacons, who had to supervise and distribute the charities of the Church.

There is no sufficient reason for thinking that these deacons of the Acts of the Apostles were not the same order as is referred to in St. Paul's later Epistles;[a] the only difference is that in the Acts, for practical reasons, the lower side of their office is more insisted on. Stephen, then, was not going beyond his province when, with a view to propagating the Faith, he held public disputations in Jerusalem. But, undoubtedly, many a man would have contented himself with much less; probably with such a rearrangement of the public charities of the Church as should silence the complaint of the widows. Stephen viewed his new position not as an office, the duties of which must be got through somehow, but as an opportunity for new and enlarged efforts on behalf of the Faith.

That this energy or force of character was not simply natural, is plain by the language which Holy Scripture employs to describe it. Stephen was, before his ordination, "full of faith and of the Holy Ghost;"[b] he was in action "full of faith and power;"[c] the wisdom and spirit by which he spake in the disputes in the synagogue of the

[a] 1 Tim. iii. 8–13. [b] Acts vi. 5. [c] *Ib.* 8.

Libertines was so great that his opponents could not resist him.[a] When the last scene was upon him, and the angry Sanhedrin was already threatening him with a dreadful death, Stephen, "being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into Heaven."[b] His strength was given him by the Divine Spirit, Who, in accordance with our Lord's promise[c] on the eve of His own sufferings, had come down on the Day of Pentecost to give force as well as wisdom to the children of His Church.

This, brethren, holds good of all religious energy which God accepts. It is not at bottom, as men think, a matter of natural character; since it is constantly exhibited by persons who are naturally indolent or timid. Now, as of old, it comes from a higher source than nature; from that Holy and Eternal Spirit Who divideth unto every man severally as He will.[d] This force is nothing else than charity; the love of God in the first place, and then, for God's sake, the love of man. Stephen was richly endowed with this spiritual force. The love of God made him speak as he did, at the cost of his life, before the Sanhedrin; the love of man made his last prayer a prayer for the pardon of his murderers. Contrast Stephen's prayer with that of the dying priest Zechariah, who, as described in the First Lesson for this afternoon's service,[e] was stoned by the command of King Joash in the court of the Temple.[f] "When he died, he said, The Lord look upon it, and require it." Since then human nature had been endowed with a new power in the Person of the Incarnate Son. Stephen's life was so rich in results, and his death so bright with moral glory, because he shared so largely

[a] Acts vi. 10.
[b] *Ib.* vii. 55.
[c] St. John xvi. 7, 13.
[d] 1 Cor. xii. 11.
[e] St. Stephen's Day: Proper First Lesson for Evening Service.
[f] 2 Chron. xxiv. 22.

in the gift which came through His Spirit from our Ascended Saviour.

3. For St. Stephen was thus a martyr; the first martyr. "Thy martyr Stephen,"[a] is the expression of St. Paul in after-times. The idea of martyrdom as the highest form of moral courage, as the crowning achievement of a noble life, is a creation of Christianity. It grew out of the idea of the inviolate sanctity of truth; and this, again, was based on the conviction that God had indeed spoken to the world by His Son,[b] and that man in consequence really possesses a truth which is worth costly sacrifices. Before this, except among the Jewish people, there was no idea of the obligations, or even of the existence, of truth as Christians understand it. The human mind was worn out by the importunities of innumerable guesses at truth, many of them contradictory of each other; and in its despair it exclaimed again and again with Pilate, "What is truth?"[c] It seemed that nothing was so certain as to be worth living for, still less, worth dying for.

It was the glory of St. Stephen conspicuously to illustrate by his personal example the vigour of the new sense—the sense of truth—which was being developed among redeemed men. Eight months before, he knew, perhaps he had witnessed, the price paid for truth on Mount Calvary. "To this end was I born," said the Divine Sufferer, "and for this cause came I into the world, that I might bear witness unto the Truth."[d] He Who said this said also, "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me, both in Jerusalem, and in Samaria, and in the uttermost parts of the earth."[e] This witness was to be borne, partly by teaching, partly by action, partly, in those days chiefly, by suffering.

[a] Acts xxii. 20. [b] Heb. i. 2. [c] St. John xviii. 38.
[d] *Ib.* 37. [e] Acts i. 8.

If action is more eloquent than language, suffering is more eloquent than action. Many a man can talk well who cannot act consistently. More men can act with tolerable consistency who yet shrink from silent, unrepining endurance for the sake of truth and goodness. Stephen did all these. He taught well and much; he acted vigorously; his action was consistent with his teaching; and when the time came he could suffer. If the speech before the Sanhedrin was his great work in life, his death did more than his greatest work. Then, as again and again in later ages, the blood of the Christian martyr, rather than the eloquence of the Christian teacher, was the seed of the Church.

Observe here, brethren, that when St. Stephen is greatest he is most easy of imitation. None of us, it seems, now work his miracles; none, certainly, can present truth to others with the high authority which belonged to him. But, in our measure, we can all suffer something, however comparatively trivial, for the Divine Cause among men. And this capacity is the true force of the Church; the reserve force on which she falls back in times of discouragement or trial. The eloquence of endurance is the most persuasive and the most lasting of her gifts; and every man, woman, or child, who is a servant of Christ, may by God's grace have a share in it.

III.

Three reflections in conclusion.

1. Many persons think and say that they could do much for the cause of truth and goodness, if only they had time enough in which to do it. They are, as it is, young; or they have not many hours at their disposal. And the consequence is they do little or nothing.

Reflect, brethren, that Stephen was probably a young man, and that he was a Christian only for a few months. Not more than eight months, it is probable, had passed since our Lord's Crucifixion. But St. Stephen's great work was already done, and he had closed by a martyr's death a ministry already rich in the best results.

In all that touches the human soul, time counts for less than men think. Fifty years may easily be passed without any real growth or work, while a few weeks, or days, or even a few hours, may decide the most momentous issues. Concentration of aim, and intensity of thought and will, may make time to be of little or no account; and a young man who throws himself with single-heartedness of purpose into a cause or work which he knows to be deserving of his best energies, can do almost anything. History is full of the lives of those who have done the work of a long life in a few years, and have died young. Divines like Aquinas, statesmen like Pitt, musicians like Mozart, philanthropists like Edward Denison, missionaries like Martyn and Patteson,—these have taught the world, in their several places and degrees, that hoar hairs and length of days are not a necessary condition of doing effective work. They have taught again the lesson taught by Stephen, who was still a young man, and seemed to have before him a life which was pregnant with possibilities of greatness, when he lay down to die outside the walls of Jerusalem.

2. Again, many men think that if they were only in a higher and more influential position than they are, they could do something really useful! If that lieutenant were only a general, or at the Horse-guards, how far better would it fare with the army! If this public writer were only in the Cabinet, how much bolder and wiser would

be the public policy of the country! If such and such a clergyman were only a Bishop, how different would be the circumstances of the Church!

St. Stephen was not in a position of influence—at least, of commanding influence. He was only a Deacon, whose main business for the time it was to attend to the equitable distribution of alms. Above him were the sacred Twelve, chosen by our Lord Himself; eleven of them during His earthly Life, and one since His Ascension. In the eyes of all true Christians they held a foremost place; they corresponded to the twelve Patriarchs of Israel; upon them, as upon the twelve Prophets, as upon a foundation, was built, says St. Paul,[a] the Church of God. But the Deacons were of no especial consideration. The Church had existed without them, and their humble but useful labours were not indispensable to her existence or progress.

And yet St. Stephen does a work which is greater than that of any, except the three leading Apostles and St. Paul; so far as we can gather from the report in the New Testament. For awhile, in the narrative of the Acts, we lose sight of St. Peter altogether, while St. Paul has not yet come upon the Christian scene. The one dominant figure, full of interest—of moral, spiritual, tragic interest—is the Deacon Stephen. His labours, his teaching, his last agonies, his tranquil and sublime triumph over death, eclipse for the time being all besides.

No, brethren; this habit of thinking that you could do great good if you were something else than you are, is fatal to doing what you might do where you are. As a rule, men who do little in a lower position would do less in a higher. The man who wasted the one talent made the one talent an excuse for his failure.[b] But he would

[a] Eph. ii. 20. [b] St. Matt. xxv. 24, 25.

have wasted five. A life which is spent in dreaming of what might be in other circumstances, cannot act for the best in present circumstances. If Stephen had said, "If I only were in Peter's place I would dispute with the Hellenists, and address the Sanhedrin, and die, if need be, as a martyr for Christ," he never would have done any one of these things. He did what he could where he was, and his real greatness was altogether independent of his position.

3. Lastly, men have asked why Christmas Day, of all days in the year, should be followed by the Festival of the first Christian Martyr—the Birthday of the world's True King, by the anniversary of a tragedy. The answer, surely, is not far to seek—at least, for a practical Christian. Yesterday proclaimed the great Christian Truth; to-day points the moral. The Incarnation of the Son of God is not a speculation of the understanding; it is a fact in history which has lessons for the heart. It is incomparably the greatest fact in the whole history of our race. And as such it imposes on us men corresponding moral duties. If the Everlasting and the Almighty laid aside His glory, to enter into conditions of time, and to robe Himself in our frail human nature, that He might, by His Atoning Death, and by His supernatural gift of a new nature unite us to God through our union with Himself, surely it is no exaggeration to say, that

> "Were the whole realm of nature mine,
> That were an offering far too small;
> Love so amazing, so Divine,
> Demands my soul, my life, my all."

And Stephen, shedding his blood thus freely and joyfully for the Master Who had redeemed him, shows what faith

in an Incarnate God should mean for Christians. If He has done so much for me, what can I do for Him? is the question which a Christian life should answer. He may ask little or much. He may demand heroic sacrifices, or He may require only punctual attention to daily and prosaic duty. But He has a right to make any demands He will, and it should be a point of honour with every Christian to satisfy Him. It is this simple self-surrender, in a spirit of love for God and for the souls of men, which makes life strong and noble, as was the life of St. Stephen. It is this self-surrender which makes death, whenever or wherever it may come, a "falling asleep" in Christ. Pray we the Divine Child, born as at this time for us, that we being regenerate, and made His brethren, and the Father's children "by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by the Holy Spirit;" so that for us, as for Stephen, and for Stephen's greater disciple, to live may be "Christ," and to die endless "gain." [a]

[a] Phil. i. 21.

SERMON XI.

GOOD OUT OF EVIL.

(SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS: FEAST OF ST. STEPHEN.)

ACTS VIII. 2–4.

And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the Church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word.

THUS the curtain falls upon the scene of the first tragedy in the annals of the Church of Christ. The first drops have fallen of that shower of blood which Christians were to shed for their Master's Name through so many succeeding centuries. St. Stephen, the first martyr, has passed through his trial, and has won his crown.

I.

This event must have meant a great deal—more than we can easily understand at once—for the infant Church at Jerusalem.

Consider its importance as the first occurrence that broke in upon the quiet, unnoticed life of the little band of Apostolic Christians. The year had not yet expired

which had witnessed what we know to have been the greatest events in human history; the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, the Ascension of our Lord. But on the hill of Zion, hard by the tomb of David, the Christian Church had been inspired by the descent of the Holy Spirit with a Divine power and life. On that memorable Day of Pentecost and afterwards it had received not a few additions to its ranks. But it was still a small community, attracting little notice in a city like Jerusalem; the capital of the old religion, the seat of the local Roman government. There the first Church of Christ lived a private, secluded existence, rejoicing in its possession of its unseen Redeemer, Crucified, Risen, Ascended, yet intimately present with it, the secret of its joy and of its strength. Every day those first Christians passed the spots which a few months before had been the scenes of the Passion and the Resurrection of the Son of God. Through their constant communion with Him, and with each other in Him, they became more and more crucified to the world around them; more indifferent to its proceedings, almost forgetful of its existence. They were "hidden privily in God's Presence from the provoking of all men, and kept secretly in His tabernacle from the strife of tongues." [a]

To this tranquil period, a sudden and violent stop was put by St. Stephen's death. That event meant that the infant Church had entered in good earnest into conflict with the power of a hostile world. If the Church might say with the Psalmist, "Though an host of men were laid against me, yet shall not my heart be afraid; and though there rose up war against me, yet will I put my trust in Him," [b] yet there was no mistaking the significance of the change. Those first days of tranquillity

[a] Ps. xxxi. 22. [b] *Ib.* xxvii. 3.

and insignificance had passed; the public wrestling against principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world,[a] had begun.

St. Stephen's death would not merely have marked an epoch; it must have been in itself, notwithstanding the moral glory of the dying martyr, a serious discouragement. Stephen was one of the most important men in the little Christendom of those first months. He was a personality of commanding proportions. He was not, indeed, a ruler of the Church. He was not an Apostle; still less a kinsman of the Redeemer. He was not even a Jew by birth. He was, as his name shows, of foreign extraction; and this hindrance to his influence with a community mainly of Jewish origin was not compensated for by high ministerial position or office. He was only a Deacon. But what was lacking to him in official dignity was supplied by personal characteristics. As St. Jerome, though only a Presbyter, meant more to the Church than Damasus, Bishop of Rome; and St. Bernard more than Eugenius III.; and Richard Hooker more than Archbishop Whitgift; and Pusey or Keble more than Archbishop Sumner; so the New Testament seems to suggest that in the first year of the Christian Church, Stephen, though only a Deacon, filled a greater place in the heart and thought of the people of Christ than did any of the Apostles, except those pillars[b] of the sacred edifice—Peter, James, and John. St. Stephen was forced into the front by the work which came ready to his hand.

The original occasion of his appearance might seem to be sufficiently commonplace. The Christians of Greek birth complained that their claims were neglected in the administration of the public funds of the Church; and

[a] Eph. vi. 12. [b] Gal. ii. 9.

Stephen, with six others, was made what we should call nowadays a charity commissioner. But, as the fund which he was to administer had been offered to Almighty God, and was regarded as His, these commissioners were ordained as Deacons.[a] Stephen, no doubt, found it easy to correct the wrong which was matter of complaint; but his energy soon found vent in a higher sphere, in which he at once distanced his colleagues. Himself a Greek convert to the Revelation of Sinai, who by a second conversion had passed into the Church of Christ, Stephen concentrated his efforts for the instruction and conversion of his old friends, upon those synagogues in Jerusalem which were frequented by proselytes of Greek blood. He at once gave an impression of being no common man. He is described as being "full of faith and of the Holy Ghost;"[b] as "full of grace and power."[c] Men could not, we are told, resist the spirit and wisdom that was in him.[d] He had, indeed, the power of working miracles; but he would seem to have used it as a means of drawing attention to what he had to say about religious truth. When his soul was possessed with his great subject, the inward illumination appeared to light up his bodily countenance with an unearthly fire, and men "saw his face as it had been the face of an angel."[e]

St. Stephen's work and influence were clearly of high importance; but we can only do them justice if we consider the particular truth which it was his business to proclaim.

All through those later summer and autumn months of the year of the Crucifixion, the Apostles and their flock had led a double life; on the one hand praying together, and celebrating daily in private the great Sacrament of our Lord's dying love;[f] on the other, still frequenting the

[a] Acts vi. 1-6. [b] *Ib.* 5. [c] *Ib.* 8.
[d] *Ib.* 10. [e] *Ib.* 15. [f] *Ib.* ii. 46.

Temple, just like the Jews around them, witnessing its daily sacrifices, and behaving themselves conformably to its time-honoured traditions.[a] All at once Stephen appeared upon the scene, like one of those figures in history who are destined to form an epoch. He saw that if Christians went on treating attendance at the Temple services and obedience to the Mosaic ritual as necessary features of a Christian life, the Church of Christ would never spread, as Christ had designed, throughout the world; it would be confined to the Holy Land, perhaps even to the Holy City. He, therefore, insisted that attendance at the Temple worship and obedience to the ceremonial law was not now a necessary part of the true service of God. We may gather the ordinary topics of his preaching from the defence which he made before the Sanhedrin.[b] He pointed out how, before our Lord came, God's grace had not been confined to any one spot or territory. Abraham had been called in the distant and pagan East; Egypt had been the scene of God's commission to Moses; the very desert had become holy ground through the Divine manifestation in the burning bush. Even when the Temple was built, a spiritual worship, which could dispense with the Temple, was proclaimed. At the same time, Stephen maintained that the spirit which had rejected and crucified Jesus Christ was no new spirit in the world or in the Jewish race. The Patriarch Joseph and the Lawgiver Moses had both been assailed by it; and if the Jews of that generation would escape the fatal errors of their predecessors, they must study the real meaning of those earlier histories, in which the wide range and freedom of the grace of God were so strikingly conspicuous. In all this St. Stephen was drawing out a truth latent in the teaching of our

[a] Acts ii. 46; iii. 1; v. 42. [b] *Ib.* vii. 1–53.

Lord, but not yet put forth with such startling clearness; and when thus teaching, it may be added, he is the spiritual ancestor of St. Paul, who expands, illustrates, and defends in his greatest Epistles the truth that the Church could not be the home of the human race until she had broken away from the swaddling-clothes of her Jewish mother. Thus there was a time, within a twelvemonth of the Crucifixion, when Stephen was the most active exponent and champion of Apostolic Christianity. And the importance attaching to his character and work and discourses was enhanced by the sudden and violent character of his death.

His bold and impressive attitude could not but arrest the attention of the authorities who ruled and guarded all that remained of the old religion of Israel. He was arrested on the charge of speaking blasphemous words against Moses and against God, and of predicting that Jesus of Nazareth would destroy the holy place and change the customs which Moses delivered.[a] In these charges we can easily separate the element of fact from that of falsehood or exaggeration; but the speech which St. Stephen made in his defence ended in a passage which, by its unanswerable truth, provoked the extreme indignation of his Jewish hearers. Still the matter might have ended differently had not Stephen at that moment seen and described a vision of Christ in glory. As he gazed upwards on the open sky, beholding a sight which was hidden from the eyes of those around him, he suddenly exclaimed, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God."[b] He spoke as if talking to himself. But his words, describing the triumph of One Whom His own judges had lately crucified, drove them to exasperation. Without appealing to the Roman authorities, without asking for any civil

[a] Acts vi. 11–14. [b] *Ib.* vii. 56.

sanction, they rushed upon Stephen, dragged him out of the Temple area, then out of the city, by a gate hard by that which still bears his name, and so down the hill almost to the brink of the torrent-bed of the Kedron. There, as the current tradition runs, on a small platform of rock, not more than two hundred yards from the scene of our Lord's Agony in Gethsemane, but on the hither side of the brook, they inflicted on him that terrible death by stoning which the Law prescribed for blasphemy.[a] There he died, praying our Lord to receive his soul, and to have compassion on his murderers.[b] And as night came on, and the crowd of bystanders that had lingered round the mangled and disfigured body moved away, the Greek Christians, his kinsmen by race as well as by faith, gathered round, and carried the martyr to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.[c]

II.

The events which followed upon St. Stephen's death are instructive in many ways. But they teach us more especially one of the principles of God's government of the world, and, connected with this, a rule of conduct which it is important to bear in mind.

First, they teach us that, so far as this sphere of existence, at any rate, is concerned, evil is permitted to exist and to triumph, only that sooner or later, in one way or another, good may be brought out of it. The most patent of all facts, and the most mysterious of all mysteries, is the permission of evil by a Good and All-powerful God. That He does permit it is a matter of experience; that He should do so is a matter of constant wonder to those who believe Him to be at once Almighty and All-holy.

[a] Lev. xxiv. 16. [b] Acts vii. 59, 60. [c] *Ib.* viii. 2.

All that we can be sure of is that man's will would not be free unless it were free to choose evil; that to make evil impossible would be to destroy man's free-will. And as the most perfect service of God is offered by a creature which has the power of choosing, but also the power of rejecting Him, God, Who after all sees further than the wisest of men, has practically decided that free-will, with its terrible attendant liability, moral evil, is better than a universe in which no evil would be possible only because no will was free.

But if God thus permits evil to exist, He is, so to say, incessantly at work upon it; forcing it, in spite of its inherent nature, to yield Him indirect and reluctant service, by issuing in some form of good. In doing this He takes His time: why should He not, since He is Eternal? He takes His time. Evil is not always followed by good on the morning of the next day. But sooner or later good is brought out of evil; and thus we are enabled to trace, within limits, the purpose of God in permitting events, acts, characters, for which it is difficult to account if they are considered in relation to the government of the world by a Being of perfect Goodness and boundless Power.

There can be no doubt that the death of St. Stephen must have appeared at the moment to those first Christians as marking a great triumph of evil. The withdrawal of a man of such power and activity from this earthly scene, where his peculiar capacities were, as it seemed, so greatly needed; the high-handed violence which precipitated his death; the evident resolve of the leading minds in Jerusalem to exterminate Christianity;—all these might well have inspired widespread alarm and discouragement. What were the whispered conversations, what the prayers of the Christians on the evening of the day on which St.

Stephen died, when, after the interment, they had found their way back, one by one, to their secret homes in the Holy City? Would they not have had recourse to the Psalter; their Prayer-book as it is ours? "Hold not Thy tongue, O God, keep not still silence: refrain not Thyself, O God. For lo, Thine enemies make a murmuring: and they that hate Thee have lift up their head. They have imagined craftily against Thy people, and taken counsel against Thy secret ones. They have said, Come, and let us root them out, that they be no more a people."[a] "My confusion is daily before me, and the shame of my face hath covered me; for the voice of the slanderer and blasphemer, for the enemy and avenger. And though all this be come upon us, yet do we not forget Thee, nor behave ourselves frowardly in Thy covenant."[b]

Were such prayers answered?

At first, indeed, it might have seemed that the only consequence of Stephen's death would be the outbreak of a general persecution, which might stamp Christianity out of existence. Saul, a young Rabbi, who had taken a prominent part in the proceedings against Stephen, and who had watched the clothes of his murderers while they carried out their bloody work, was a leading persecutor. "He," we are told, "made havoc of the Church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison."[c]

May not the little band of Christians have thought that God had left them to themselves? Would not their prayers have been more importunate, more passionate, more pathetic, than before? "Up, Lord, why sleepest Thou? awake, and be not absent from us for ever. Why withholdest Thou Thy face, and forgettest our misery and trouble? For our soul is brought low, even to the dust:

[a] Ps. lxxxiii. 1–4. [b] *Ib.* xliv. 16–18. [c] Acts viii. 3.

our belly cleaveth unto the ground. Arise, and help us: and deliver us for Thy mercy's sake." [a]

This is the first effect of St. Stephen's death noted by the sacred writer; a sharper persecution of the Church by the as yet unconverted Saul. And the second? "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word;" [b] the very last thing, we may be sure, that was intended either by Saul the persecutor, or by the high authorities who countenanced or employed him. But for the death of St. Stephen and the subsequent persecution, these pioneers of the Faith would perhaps have been content to stay at home, basking in the moral sunshine that their religion had brought to them; but enjoying and fondling it in private, while making no effort for the spiritual well-being of others at a distance. Now the dangers which await Christians in Jerusalem, the stir and ferment which had been created by the words and the sufferings of Stephen, the spectacle of his tranquil, saintly death, have all had their effect. The Church of Jerusalem goes into exile, and almost every one of its members is perforce a missionary.

But Saul, you observe, goes on persecuting, arresting, imprisoning, accusing. Never mind: wait and see what he will be doing a year hence. There is something significant, something to arrest attention, in his feverish activity. Men often try to crush a conviction, which is taking shape within them, and which they dread to recognize, by talking or acting violently in an opposite direction. They hope that the conscience will obey the tongue or the arms, or that, at least, its voice will be silenced amid the din of work. But Saul has heard that speech before the Sanhedrin; and he knows that it was not answered by arguments, but only by stones. Saul has

[a] Ps. xliv. 23–26. [b] Acts viii. 4.

marked the bearing of the martyr in his last moments, while he himself stood by keeping the raiment of them that slew him. Let us be patient with him. He will make a few more Christian homes desolate, and then he will be on the road to Damascus.

The Divine plan of overruling even triumphant evil to some purposes of good, is brought before us constantly in Holy Scripture. St. Stephen's dying speech itself leads us to consider the career of Joseph and Moses. What could be more cruel and undeserved than the hardships experienced by Joseph!—sold by his brothers as a slave into Egypt, calumniated in Egypt as a vulgar adulterer, imprisoned for crimes of which he never was guilty. And yet these circumstances were the steps of his passage to that high position near the Egyptian throne, which he filled with such advantage to Egypt, with such benefit to his family, with such happy and far-reaching results beyond. Moses would never have become the great Lawgiver and leader of the chosen people, unless his earlier and most promising career had been rudely cut short by proscription and flight; and we should not now be singing some of the most pathetic and spiritual of the Psalms, unless David had had to fly for his life before the vengeance of Saul,[a] and unless Jerusalem had been besieged by the Assyrian,[b] and devastated by the Babylonian armies.[c] The greatest of the prophets were all, at some time in their lives, victims of evil. Isaiah lived under Manasseh; Jeremiah under Zedekiah and his advisers; Ezekiel and Daniel were captives. No prosperous, well-to-do, tranquil life seems entirely to befit the high strains of prophecy. It is good for Prophet and Psalmist to have been in trouble.[d] It is when he is singing by the waters of Babylon,[e] or in a

[a] Ps. vii., xi.
[b] *Ib.* xliv., xlviii., lxxv., lxxvi.
[c] *Ib.* lxxix., lxxx., cxxxvii.
[d] *Ib.* cxix. 71.
[e] *Ib.* cxxxvii. 1.

barren and dry land where no water is,[a] that his inspirations are loftiest and purest; the miseries of his country, the hardships he undergoes personally, undeserved and overwhelming though they be, are the condition, if not the measure, of his prophetic insight.

This law of God's Providence is especially apparent in the case of our Lord and Saviour. He passed His earthly Life in intimate contact with physical and moral evils. The prejudices and violence of the Jews, the hatred of the Pharisees, the treason of Judas, the denial of Peter, the cowardice of Pilate, the purple robe, the crown of thorns, the spitting, the Wounds, the buffeting, the accumulated insults of act and word, the deep-muttered curses of the priests and of the multitude, the solitude, the thirst, the darkness of the Cross,—what were they but so many notes of the triumphant insolence of evil face to face with the Highest Good? And yet have they not proved, are they not at this moment, so many sources of unspeakable consolation and blessing to the millions of a redeemed world?

And as with single lives, so with great events in the history of peoples, of Churches. What could have seemed more utterly hopeless than the condition of God's people at the moment of the Babylonish captivity? As Jeremiah sat in his grotto near the ruins of the desolate city, what a picture of humiliation, misery, ruin, did he draw in his Lamentations! The cruelty and insolence of the heathen, the sufferings of the captives, the terrible famine, the anguish of the young, the silent despair of the old, the humiliation of the Royal House, the slaughter of the Elders, of the Priests, of the Prophets, the visible ruin of the city, the sanctuary, the Temple![b] "For this our heart is faint," he cries; "for these things our eyes are

[a] Ps. lxiii. 2.

[b] See especially Lam. ii. 1–19.

dim. Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk on it." [a]

And yet this very ruin, in itself the effect and proof of the heathen triumph, was overruled to be a signal blessing. Never were the descendants of the patriarchs so conscious of their privileges, so devoted to their Law, so bound in heart and desire to their city and sanctuary, as when all seemed lost, and they were living as slaves in a distant land. The hundred and nineteenth Psalm is a picture of the inner life of a devout Jew in Babylon. But for the Captivity, Israel would never have known the immense moral rebound, the joy and triumph of the Return; nor would Israel have been one half of what it has been to the world and to Christendom. And if, in our day, hearts are sometimes downcast and fearful of calamities that seem to be approaching; of great wars, of the fall of cherished and sacred institutions, of the triumph of evil in this or that direction; let us be sure that nothing is permitted which cannot be overruled, and that the darkest hour in the fortunes of truth and goodness on this earth may well be the eve of their final triumph.

Here, too, we see not merely a law of the Divine government, but a rule for our own conduct. We, in our little way, may imitate, within very narrow limits, the high Providences of God, by resolutely bringing good out of evil.

Nothing is gained by ignoring, or making light of evil, or endeavouring to represent it as less grave than it is. It is not pessimism to open our eyes wide and see things as they really are. Evil, whether personal or social, moral or physical, in Church or State, is always serious. The question is how best to deal with it.

[a] Lam. v. 17, 18.

There are two ways of taking the ills of life.

One is to forget that God has anything to do with them; to refer them to human, to immediate, to secondary causes; to see in them only steps in a fatal sequence of events, against which the heart sullenly revolts, or under the pressure of which it sinks down in despairing apathy.

The other is to seek in them some clear trace of God's Will respecting us. Every trial, loss of friends, loss of income, loss of health, has its appointed lesson. The true course is to seek for the ray of light beyond the darkness; to discover the note of purpose and order in circumstances which look like chaos or chance. It is always there. Every trial has its own appointed lesson; and all trials have certain lessons which are common to all. They may and should leave us different men; with a simpler dependence on Almighty God; with a stronger desire to consecrate life to His service; with more inward separation from sin, its sympathies and associations; with greater readiness to help others in trouble, whether of mind or body. The Church of Jerusalem learnt much from its sorrows on the day that Stephen died. Sickness and pain of body may promote joy and health of soul; the sorrow for departed friends may guide us to love of that One Friend Who is never lost.

The trials which other men bring on us may be not less useful than those which come directly from the Hand of God. Take the case of a perfectly baseless calumny, industriously spread, such as that which has pursued more than one excellent servant of Christ for many years. What is the true way of meeting it? Is it to be treated with lofty disdain, as a brutality or a vulgarity beneath notice? Certainly, that treatment might befit a magnificent pagan, but it would not become a servant of our Lord. Is it to be allowed to prey upon all that is most

sensitive in character; paralyzing resolve, undermining energy, eating out heart? So it has fared with more than one victim of calumny. But this, too, does not become a Christian. In presence of a calumny, the first question for a man to ask himself is, Is it true? Not as a whole, for then it would not be a calumny; but, if not as a whole, yet in part? In the spirit, if not in the letter? And if there be any basis of truth in it, then a Christian will set himself resolutely to better what has to be bettered, and will be grateful for having had his attention directed to the task. If, on the other hand, there is not a shred of ground or justification for the calumny, then be sure that a blessing still attends it, if it be cheerfully and resignedly borne; the blessing of being conformed in this high respect to our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

One of the most beautiful books in Christian literature is *The Spiritual Combat.*[a] It was written by a man who suffered from a lifelong calumny. He found in communion with his own heart and with God that which enabled him to triumph over the injustice of his fellow-men, and to leave a legacy of spiritual wisdom to succeeding generations.

The worst trials which come on us are those which are due to our own misconduct. Can we turn our misconduct itself to any good account? Can we force sin to become in some sense an occasion and minister of grace? Certainly, sin can never be justified on the ground that it does sometimes promote, or may be made to promote, good. Evil directly produces only evil; if it leads to good, it is only as an indirect consequence of itself. One

[a] *The Spiritual Combat*, by Scupoli, ed. Pusey; cf. Pref. vi.–viii. This work was adapted to the use of the English Church in the seventeenth century. With the *Imitation of Christ*, it was the constant companion of Bishop Steere, the heroic missionary in Central Africa.

lie involves another, and generally a worse lie; every lie strengthens the fatal habit of untruthfulness. Even if the lie has screened some evil, the admission or publication of which would cause widespread mischief, yet still the lie remains a lie, with its full measure of moral mischief attaching to it as such for the man who tells it. Thus it never can be right to do evil that good may come; because evil necessarily is, and leads to, evil; while good is only occasioned by it independently of its true drift and nature.

Still, even our sins may sometimes be made occasions or stimulants of good; we may bring good out of these evils. If we can do nothing else after a sin, we can learn truthfulness by confessing it, and humility by bearing it in mind. David could not recall to life the wronged and murdered Uriah; but, in the sincerity of his penitence, he could utter words which have been the language of true penitents ever since.[a] Saul of Tarsus could not undo the long catalogue of violences and wrongs inflicted by him on the Church of Jerusalem; but the memory of it in after years stimulated him to labour more abundantly than all the other Apostles of Christ[b] for the Church of which he had once made havoc. If we can do no more to repair the effects of past wrongs, we can at least bear them in mind, that they may make us zealous while they keep us humble. In any case, they may lead us to turn with more sincerity to our Divine Redeemer, Who as at this time took our nature upon Him, and was born of a pure Virgin, that we being regenerate, and made His children by adoption and grace, might daily be renewed by His Holy Spirit.[c]

[a] Ps. li. [b] 1 Cor. xv. 10. [c] Collect for Christmas Day.

SERMON XII.

OUR KNOWLEDGE IN THE FUTURE.

(SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS: FEAST OF THE HOLY INNOCENTS.)

ST. JOHN XIII. 7.

What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.

THIS saying recalls a period of our Lord's Life altogether remote from that which now occupies the thought and heart of the Church. But it is, like all our Lord's words, of wide applicability; and there are reasons for considering it to-day which will presently appear. Our Lord and His disciples were at the Paschal Supper on the evening before His Death. Suddenly He rises from among the company, lays aside His upper robe, takes a towel, girds Himself, pours water into a basin, begins to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. The scene is described with the particularity of an eye-witness, whom nothing had escaped, and upon whom every circumstance had made a deep impression. Whether the action which so significantly interrupted the course of the supper was meant to illustrate, as by a parable, something that had been said in the course of conversation, we are not

told. But we are told that it was performed by our Lord in full view of the authority which He wielded, and of all that was involved in His appearance among men. "Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His Hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments; and took a towel, and girded Himself. After that He poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded."[a]

The action, therefore, which followed, simple as it was, evidently had great significance. But what it meant the Apostles did not as yet understand. When our Lord reached St. Peter, He was met by an expression of surprise: "Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?"[b] To Peter, looking only at the outward act, and thinking it degrading to his Master to be engaged in such menial service, this refusal seemed the natural and considerate expression of his attachment and respect. But Peter was warned that he was mistaken in declining a service of which he did not yet understand the motive. A truer respect would have been shown by at once, and gratefully, accepting it; in the confidence that what was offered by his Master could never safely be declined, and that he himself would learn in a coming time why it had been offered. Indeed, the real meaning of such an action could not be understood by the disciples until after our Lord's Crucifixion, when He shed His Blood "for the remission of sins,"[c] or even until after Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost came to teach men, among other things, the true meaning of all that might seem trivial or purposeless in the Life of our Divine Master.

It is our Lord, then, kneeling at the feet of St. Peter,

[a] St. John xiii. 3-5. [b] *Ib.* 6. [c] Rom. iii. 25.

in the form and garb of a servant, girded with a towel, and anxious to overcome the unwise resistance of His Apostle, Who utters the words, "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter."

Such a saying could not but have a wider scope than the occasion which prompted it would suggest. It is the language of One Who is more than man; we are listening to the Divine attributes of Wisdom, Love, and Providence, as they condescend, through the Mouth of Jesus Christ, to justify certain aspects of the government of the world which distress or perplex our finite understandings. What the Eternal Wisdom does may at times seem foolishness to men. What the Eternal Charity does may seem to men at times harsh and unloving. What the Eternal Providence does, or refrains from doing, may lead men to say that God has left His own world to itself, and that we are the sport of forces which have escaped from, or have always been independent of, the control of the Creator. But the future is on the side of God; it will, either here or beyond the veil, justify His ways to man. "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter."

I.

Consider the scene which is brought before us by the Festival of to-day.[a]

Herod the Great was drawing near to his last days when our Lord Jesus Christ was born. He was one of those rulers whose able conduct of public affairs offers a strange contrast to the misery which an ungoverned and capricious temper inflicts at home. In his dealings with the masters of the Roman world, Antony and Octavius; and in the courage and promptitude with which he estab-

[a] Feast of the Holy Innocents.

lished and maintained his authority in very difficult circumstances, Herod displayed qualities which entitle him to respect. But his domestic history is stained with blood. The tragical fate of his wife Mariamne, and of his sons Alexander, Aristobulus, and Antipater, are well known; one of Herod's last acts before his death was to sign an order for Antipater's execution. The condition of his unhappy family may be illustrated by the saying, attributed, it is true, by a later writer, but with apparent accuracy, to Augustus, that it were better to be Herod's pig than his son.[a] Herod was already in failing health when our Lord was born, and when he received the visit of the Wise Men in Jerusalem; and illness had made him more suspicious and irritable than before. The appearance of the miraculous star, and the interest excited by it among travellers of consideration from the distant East, would have increased his irritability. And when he found that the Wise Men, after adoring our Lord in Bethlehem, had returned to their home by a more direct road than that which lay through Jerusalem, his jealousy became an uncontrolled passion. His earlier feeling, that an Infant of the race of David, Who might one day be formidable to the Idumæan dynasty, had better be put out of the way, was now merged in an unreasoning, undiscriminating thirst for blood; one of those outbreaks of boisterous vindictiveness which had become periodically habitual with him. He was, indeed, too late to effect his real object; since, warned by a heavenly vision, St. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin had already set out with their precious charge on the journey to Egypt. But passion does not pause to observe or to reason; and Herod issued an order for the immediate destruction of all male children who were something

[a] Macrobius, *Sat.* ii. 4.

more than two years old, and anything less[a]—that seems to be the meaning of the Evangelist's phrase—in the village of Bethlehem and the surrounding district. The order would have been obeyed with the exactness and alacrity of soldiers who knew that it was dangerous to trifle with the master whom they served; and as the Evangelist records the scene, he sees in it a second fulfilment of Jeremiah's forecast of Rachel shedding tears over her hapless descendants when they were gathered around her tomb at Ramah, as captives about to depart for their distant exile in Babylon.[b] A mother's agony, like all the deepest things in human nature, does not vary with the centuries; there were weeping Rachels, in good sooth, on that bloody day, in the streets of Bethlehem.

It is, however, observable that a tragedy, which comes before us so prominently in the Gospel, would, at the time of its occurrence, scarcely appear to have attracted the attention of the world at large. Little, probably, was said about it at Jerusalem; nothing in Rome. It is not referred to by the Jewish historian, Josephus; and this fact is not forgotten by writers who dispute the trustworthiness of the Gospels. Arguments from the silence of an author belong to the least forcible class of arguments. Josephus may have had his own reasons for saying nothing about this and other circumstances connected with the early history of Christianity. And, indeed,

[a] St. Matt. ii. 16.

[b] Rachel's northern tomb at Ramah would have been a cenotaph, erected to their ancestress by the affectionate piety of the tribes which were descended from her—Benjamin and Ephraim. She was really buried close to Bethlehem (Gen. xxxv. 19, 20; xlviii. 7), and the knowledge of this circumstance may have led St. Matthew to employ Jeremiah's language (Jer. xxxi. 15; St. Matt. ii. 17, 18) as he does. Rachel, in death, was really nearer to the slaughtered Innocents than she had been to the assembled captives at Ramah.

a writer of that age, having his eye upon the great events which were going on in the Roman world, may have considered the slaughter of Bethlehem an unimportant occurrence. Moreover, the number of infants actually murdered may have been less than we generally take for granted. Bethlehem was a small village, and the surrounding district was thinly populated; so that, probably, the number of children of the age mentioned in the order of Herod would not have amounted to, certainly would not have exceeded, twenty. The total amount of suffering undergone would certainly have been less than that of the poor orphans at Brooklyn, where, it is said, that three times this number perished in the flames.[a] But at Bethlehem the suffering was inflicted deliberately by human hands; and a great fire, with all its horrors, is less distressing to the imagination, because it is less degrading to human nature, than the spectacle of young children dragged from their mothers' arms by a brutal soldiery, and hacked to death before their mothers' eyes.

II.

Now, here we meet with a question which is always old, and always new. How is such a history as this to be adjusted with our belief in the government of the world by a Good and All-powerful Being?

How, asks a child, could God allow Herod to kill these poor children? If God is good, He must have thought it very wicked in Herod; and if He is Almighty, He might have prevented it. This is what most children, when they have begun to think, say about the murder of the Holy Innocents; and in doing so, they raise the greatest of all difficulties in theology.

[a] This dreadful fire occurred on December 18, 1884.

My brethren, whether God does or does not permit evil is not an open question. We know that He could not directly bring evil into existence without ceasing to be what He is. On the other hand, we have but to open our eyes and we see evil everywhere around and within us. That evil exists is a matter of fact, and it could not exist unless He, the Almighty, permitted its existence. Why does He permit it? He permits evil because to make it absolutely impossible would be to deny to His creatures the gift of moral freedom, that is, of the power to choose between good and evil. Unless evil is open to choice, good cannot be chosen freely; no creature can exist with the prerogative capacity of freely choosing the Supreme Good for his End and Portion, unless he be also capable of refusing this choice, and of choosing by preference something else. Thus the highest Archangel implies the possibility of a Lucifer; and yet God, in His Infinite Wisdom, decides that to give moral freedom, with all its actual consequences, even the most terrible and permanent, is better than to withhold it. The existence of evil is the tremendous price which is paid for the glorious liberty accorded to accountable beings to choose God and goodness freely. And if any one is disposed to object that the price is too heavy to be paid for the blessing, it can only be replied that there are many independent proofs both of the Wisdom and of the Goodness of God; that He sees further than we do, and hates evil with an intensity of which we have no conception; and yet that He has decided that the reasons for permitting evil to exist altogether preponderate.

Herod, then, slaughtering the Innocents, falls into his place as one of the results of that permission of evil, which we must accept as a principle of the Divine government. Like Pharaoh, like Saul, like Ahab, like many a Baby-

lonish king, he has his place in the order of a fallen world, as God has willed it. It is, indeed, a dreadful place. It is dreadful to be a mere foil to innocence; to pose only as its antagonist and persecutor; to be the symbol and instrument of the realm of moral darkness and rebellion. How any soul comes to occupy such a place, what light has been sinned against, what opportunities have been neglected, only one Being knows; this only is certain, that no such place is ever thrust, in all its hideousness, even on the least favoured souls. If God raised Pharaoh up that He might show in him His power,[a] Pharaoh also, by his own self-determination, hardened his heart.[b] Herod certainly need never have been what he had been for years before he issued the order to murder the Innocents.

Meanwhile, if God permits evil to be thus aggressive and buoyant, He is constantly at work on it in His own way. He is making it, unconsciously or against its bent, serve His own high and wise purposes; He is, as we say, bringing good out of it.

The wicked calumny to which Joseph was exposed by the wife of Potiphar, and his unjust imprisonment, led the way to his great and beneficent administration in Egypt. Moses would never have been placed in a position to become the leader and lawgiver of Israel but for the proscription of all the male children of the Israelites by the Egyptian king. Saul and Absalom, the one by his cruelty, the other by his undutifulness, are great although indirect contributors to the beauty of the Psalter; a David who had prospered all his life like Solomon would not have been the sweet Psalmist of Israel. Nay, the forms and forces of evil, physical and moral, which were marshalled, as never before, against the Son of God,

[a] Exod. ix. 16; Rom. ix. 17. [b] Exod. viii. 15, 32.

manifest in the flesh; the privations, the humiliations, the sufferings which He endured throughout His earthly life; the spitefulness and hardness and dulness of those most closely around Him; the hatred of the Pharisees, the cowardice of Pilate, the treason of Judas, the denial of Peter; all that He underwent in Gethsemane, in the High Priest's palace, in the Prætorium, on the Way of Sorrows; the buffeting and insults, the jeers and blasphemies, the spitting, the Wounds, the wrong, the last hours of agony;—what was this but an assault of the realm of evil on One Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His Mouth?[a] And what was the result, but such a victory of good as the world has never witnessed except on Calvary? Out of the depths of that unfathomable sorrow, there has been given to man a joy, a peace, a consolation, a strength, which still gladdens the world. It was the conquest of sin by holiness, of death by eternal life.

III.

Herod, then, in some way, we may presume, was ministering to some purpose which he did not intend; there was something in the slaughter of the Innocents which relieves by a ray of moral light the barbarous aspects of the tragedy. Let us look at the subject once more, from the side, not of the perpetrator, but of the sufferers.

Christianity, it has been truly said, differs from non-Christian systems of thought in that it has an account to give of pain, of sin, and of death. It takes the sting out of death by its revelation of a future life.[b] It does not disguise the gravity of sin, yet it brings in its hand a cure and a pardon. And it explains pain, otherwise so inexplicable, sometimes indeed as being the penalty

[a] 1 St. Pet. ii. 22. [b] 1 Cor. xv. 54–57.

of sin, but more often as a discipline administered by those Loving and All-powerful Hands Which govern the world.

Here the Gospel presents a remarkable contrast to the writings of the most cultivated pagan of the Apostolic age. It is natural to think of the philosopher Seneca in this connection. Seneca was much occupied with the prevalence of pain in the world; more than one of his letters are devoted to the subject; and he wrote three treatises, which he called "Consolations," one of them addressed to his mother. You must read him, if you would understand the interval which separates the best pagan thought on this subject from the teaching of the Apostles. For instance, Seneca is writing to a broken-hearted mother, Marcia, who has spent three years in mourning for the loss of her son, Metilius, a young man of great promise. After touching on the examples of other bereaved mothers, and on the uselessness of sorrow in view of the irreversible doom of death, Seneca advises Marcia to try to forget her grief. She should copy the example of the birds and the beasts; they lose their relations, but they soon dismiss their trouble, and enjoy life again as before.[a] As if pain in the mind of man, which is so unlike pain in an animal, precisely because man is what he is, could be soothed by a philosophy which, after prating incessantly about man's dignity, can

[a] Seneca, *Consol. ad Marciam*, c. 7, p. 145, ed. Holtze: "Adspice non mutorum animalium quam concitata sint desideria, et tamen quam brevia. Vaccarum une die alterove mugitus auditur: nec diutius equarum vagus ille amensque discursus est. Feræ quum vestigia catulorum consectatæ sunt et silvas pervagatæ, quum sæpe ad cubilia expilata redierint, rabiem intra exiguum tempus extinguunt. Aves cum stridore magno inanes nidos circumfremunt: intra momentum tamen quietæ, volatus suos repetunt. Nec ulli animali longum fœtus sui desiderium est, nisi homini." We may well wonder what Marcia would have thought and felt on reading all this.

only make him comfortable at the cost of forgetting it! And yet Seneca had witnessed sufferers who knew something of the true secret of pain.[a] Writing to a friend who was in bad health, and a great sufferer, and disposed to complain bitterly of his lot, Seneca tells him that he had seen a man subjected to every variety of torture, who yet, so far from groaning, or begging for a respite, or saying anything whatever, could laugh, even heartily, in his terrible agony."[b]

That pain, in the case of adult sufferers, may be a great blessing, is taught us by that practical philosophy which we Christians learn, from generation to generation, in the school of the Apostles. But whether pain is to bless or to curse us depends largely on ourselves. Pain is like the Presence of Christ in the Holy Sacrament; it is a reality beyond our control, but its effects upon us depend on the dispositions with which we accept it. On either side of the Divine Victim on Calvary there hung a sufferer. To one pain meant preparation for Paradise; to the other the certificate of despair.

A Christian should have no doubt of what pain is

[a] Cf. Sen., *Ep.* 14: "Nihil magis nos concutit, quam quod ex aliena potentia impendet, . . . ferrum circa se et ignes habet, et catenas, et turbam ferarum quam in viscera immittit humana. Cogita hoc loco carcerem, et cruces, et equuleos et uncum; et adactum per medium hominem, qui per os emergat, stipitem; et distracta in diversum actis curribus membra; illam tunicam, alimentis ignium et illitam et intextam." It is difficult to suppose that the writer is not thinking of the scenes that were witnessed in Nero's gardens, on the Vatican hill, in August, A.D. 64; cf. Tac., *Ann.*, xv. 44; Juv., i. 155–157.

[b] Sen., *Ep.* 78 *ad Lucilium*. After enumerating the pains and distresses which Lucilius experienced in his illness, Seneca continues: "Plus est flamma, et equuleus, et lamina, et, vulneribus ipsis intumescentibus, quod illa renovaret et altius urgeret, impressum. Inter hæc tamen aliquis non gemuit: parum est. Non rogavit: parum est. Non respondit: parum est. Risit; et quidem ex animo." Is not the philosopher describing a martyr in the Neronian persecution of A.D. 64?

meant to do for him. It is meant to discipline his character, and to illuminate his spiritual understanding.

How often does affliction soften the heart which prosperity had hardened. To be ill for the first time is to feel what illness must be to others; disease is no longer the label of an untried experience. A man lies on his bed of pain, and he says to himself, "This, then, is what that neighbour, or this acquaintance, must have suffered." Or he is prostrated by the loss of a wife or of an only child; and he understands language which some one else has used who has preceded him in this sorrow, although at the time it seemed to him exaggerated. This is why, as we see from St. Paul's First Epistle to Timothy, so much was thought of widows in the Apostolic Church; that is, if they were widows indeed, and had the grace to remain such.[a] They had suffered more than other women, and could, therefore, console other sufferers better. For as pain makes the heart tender, so it rouses the sluggish will to action. Many a man plays with religious convictions until some great trouble comes upon him; then he bestirs himself about his future as never before. How many of those who came to our Lord in the days of His Flesh were sufferers; they only came to Him because they were sufferers! They themselves, or some one near to them, were touched by the Hand of God; and they came, the chief of the synagogue, Jairus,[b] the Canaanitish woman,[c] the centurion,[d] Bartimæus,[e] and the rest, to be helped and healed. Pain stirs and braces the will. "Before I was troubled, I went wrong: but now have I kept Thy Word."[f]

And pain teaches, or may teach, while it chastens and braces us. It teaches, as nothing else teaches, dependence

[a] 1 Tim. v. 3, 5, 16. [b] St. Matt. ix. 18–25. [c] *Ib.* xv. 21–28.
[d] *Ib.* viii. 5–13. [e] St. Mark x. 46–52. [f] Ps. cxix. 67.

upon God; it is a revelation, often made to a man for the first time in his life, of his own physical and moral weakness. It suggests those Attributes of God about which in rude health we are not disposed to think; His awful Holiness and His exact Justice. As we lie on in pain, hour after hour, we reflect that God's judgments are, indeed, abroad in the world,[a] and that He is not as indifferent to moral evil as men would often fain persuade themselves in their days of health. Nay, more, pain reveals the love of God. The broken heart learns the secrets of that love as they are never learnt before; and pain is the discipline by which the heart is broken, or at least by which its contrition is, generally speaking, made possible. Pain, too, discovers to us what those around us are, and what we are ourselves. We only know others, their generosity or their heartlessness, when they have come close to us in sorrow and suffering; we only know ourselves when pain has revealed the worthlessness of much which ordinarily takes up the greater part of our thoughts, or rather the weakness and nothingness of that self which, perhaps, has hitherto been its own centre, and feeding, as the Bible says, upon ashes.[b]

So true is it that "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? . . . Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."[c]

There is, then, a Christian philosophy of pain, so far as adults are concerned, which will bear complete discussion. Granted that pain itself is an evil; pain may demon-

[a] Ps. cv. 7. [b] Isa. xliv. 20. [c] Heb. xii. 6, 7, 11.

strably be the instrument of a good which altogether outweighs it. But how does this apply to infants, or very young children? They have not yet entered, they cannot yet enter, even imperfectly, upon that solemn district of existence which we call responsibility. They could not learn the lessons which pain may teach their elders; they could not receive the discipline of heart and will which suffering only may administer in later years. They suffer, but, as it seems to us, without a definite purpose. "I can understand," said a mother, as she bent over her child in the later stage of fever, "why I should suffer thus; my conscience tells me that I deserve this and much more; my common sense tells me that there is much in my mind and character which needs the educating and disciplinary action of pain. But this child, what has it done? or what can pain teach it to be or to do?"

It is in part, but only in part, an answer to this difficulty to say that God deals with the human family as a whole; that He visits the sins of the fathers upon the children,[a] as in other ways, so in this literal sense; that much disease which is the source of pain in infants is inherited, and is traceable to the vices of a previous generation; and that among the consequences of Adam's transgression is that transmitted loss of the gift of original righteousness which needs, among other things, a remedial discipline. But it is obvious that infants who have been made Christ's members in Baptism suffer not less than the unbaptized, although in their case the entail of inherited loss has been cut off by the gift of a New Life. How are we to account for their sufferings? To say that they are suffering on account of a transmitted inheritance of evil is surely, at the best, a very partial answer to the question.

[a] Exod. xx. 5.

My brethren, there is, no doubt, a great deal about infant life which we understand very imperfectly or not at all. Our relations to the spiritual world are not to be measured by the development of our natural faculties. We know Who has said that the guardian angels of children always behold the Face of the Father;[b] and the practice of infant baptism can only be justified on the presumption that an infant does receive grace, and may be washed in the atoning Blood as truly as an adult, while he differs from an adult, happily, in that he cannot oppose a barrier to the heavenly blessing. There is, then, a presumption that such an agent as pain has beneficent operation of some kind in the world of infant life, but beyond this general presumption we cannot at present penetrate. If we ask what the precise effect is, no answer can be given which is not purely conjectural; the veil is before our eyes. But we know enough of the appointed work of pain in the adult human world to trust our Heavenly Father that pain is an angel of blessing in regions where we cannot now explain its presence. "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter."

Many of you have probably read something about that unfortunate boy, Louis XVII., who was left in the prison of the Temple in 1793, when his parents had been put to death by the Revolutionary Government of France. The true history of his sufferings was not long since made public by a French scholar, Chantelauze,[a] who published some previously inedited documents. And surely few more pathetic figures are easily to be found than that child of eight years old, but with an understanding altogether

[a] St. Matt. xviii. 10.

[b] Louis XVII. son enfance, sa prison et sa mort au Temple d'après des documents inédits des archives nationales, par R. Chantelauze: Paris, Firmin-Didot, 1884; cf. pp. 225, *sqq.*

beyond his years, and a countenance which shows an excellent disposition, and at once interests a stranger. His parents have been taken from him to suffer a violent death, and he is left in the hands of his titular governor, the coarse and degraded Simon, who, in the name of liberty, is crushing out the poor child's life by his cruelty and brutality. Sometimes he is deprived of his scanty fare; sometimes he is made drunk by force; his little body and his face are disfigured by frequent bruises; the sleep in which he might for a while forget his troubles is seldom undisturbed; and this little victim of Jacobin fanaticism undergoes all that brutality and corruption can do to brutalize and deprave before it kills him. The poor boy's only crime is that he is the descendant of a long line of kings, who had their full share of faults, but who had made France a nation; and the entail of political guilt, if such there was, might have been washed out, one might think, in his father's blood.[a] Louis XVII. is one of the innocents of history, and his tragical fate suggests the question which has already been asked, and which is constantly meeting us in life, how we are to account for suffering, apparently as undeserved as it is, in human eyes, purposeless.

There is no complete answer to that question within the range of our present knowledge. We feel here that we only see the fringe of a vaster system of government than we can yet take the measure of. Only of this we must be sure, that for all undeserved suffering there is somewhere compensation; the suffering innocents of all the centuries are premises in the great argument for an immortality after death. As we contemplate them, the Eternal Justice whispers to us, "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." As we contemplate them, an Evangelist cries, "I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the

[a] See Taine, *Origines de la France Contemporaire*, vol. iii.

Mount Sion, and with Him an hundred forty and four thousand, having His Father's Name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from Heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and the creatures, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the first-fruits unto God and unto the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God." [a]

On the last Sunday in the year, our Lord's words of warning have a significance all their own. As we look back we feel, all of us, the older more than the younger, but each in his measure, that the scene of life is sensibly changing. One well-known and kindly figure has disappeared from a high place in this Cathedral; [b] and death and other causes have shifted the centre of gravity in many a family, or placed some of its members in an entirely new position. Some of us have become aware of the presence of disease which, in the course of nature, must ere long bring our earthly career to its conclusion. At these times, conjecture, speculation, perhaps anxiety, are inevitable. Happy the man who "shall not be afraid of any evil tidings: for his heart standeth fast, and believeth in the Lord." [c] One thing among all uncer-

[a] Rev. xiv. 1–5.

[b] The Right Rev. Bishop Piers C. Claughton, D.D., Archdeacon of London, and Chaplain-General to the Forces, died August 11, 1884.

[c] Ps. cxii. 7.

tainties is certain, namely, that we are in strong and loving Hands; not the less strong because our own are feeble, not the less loving because, for the moment, He does not allow us to see our path. "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." We may with confidence leave to Him the shaping of a future which is already before His Eyes; that which supremely concerns each one of us is that we should, according to the light which He has given us, obey His guidance, in things great and small, "until the day break, and the shadows flee away." [a]

[a] Song of Sol. ii. 17.

SERMON XIII.

THE REASON OF SACRIFICE.

(SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS: FEAST OF THE HOLY INNOCENTS.)

1 CHRON. XXIX. 14.

All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee.

THIS was King David's confession in the hymn of praise which he uttered not long before his death, when the "chief of the fathers and princes of the tribes of Israel"[a] had, at his instance, offered of their wealth towards the Temple which Solomon was to build. David himself set the example; he gave with princely munificence, or, as he himself says, "with all his might;" for he remembered that "the work was great, and the palace was not for man, but for the Lord God."[b] When he had thus done what he could, he could, he knew, appeal with a clear conscience and an unfaltering voice to his subjects. And they, in their turn and according to their measure, were equal to the occasion; they gave gold, silver, brass, and iron in abundance, while "all who had precious stones gave them to the treasure of the house of the Lord."[c] There was, in fact, an enthusiasm abroad for making personal sacrifices; a contagious rapture which

[a] 1 Chron. xxix. 6. [b] *Ib.* 1. [c] *Ib.* 8.

had spread from the monarch among his people, and had taken possession of all hearts and wills. Men were tasting the exquisite moral delight which is inseparable from real self-sacrifice, when it is made for an object of which the judgment unreservedly approves. "Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly unto the Lord: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy."[a] And in his joy, David, as was his wont in all strong movements of thought or feeling, betook himself to God, and poured out the great hymn, of which the leading thought is expressed in the words, "All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee."

These words plainly express a truth which rises high above the occasion to which they immediately refer. All the blessings of this life are God's gifts. It may move us to making generous sacrifices, if we reflect that whatever we may give to God is already His own.

I.

"All things come of Thee!" Here, first of all, is the religious estimate of the world and of life, wherever religion, properly speaking, exists at all. From the religious point of view, no other conception of the relation between the world and God is possible. There is no room for religion, if the Universe is conceived of as existing somehow without the agency of God, or if God is in some way identified with, and so practically buried in, His own Universe. It is only with God, as the Maker of all things, visible and invisible; with God as distinct, in His Uncreated and Eternal Essence, from the work of His

[a] 1 Chron. xxix. 9.

Hands, that the human soul can enter into that bond of dependence and service which we call religion. Day by day, in his inmost heart, a religious man turns his thoughts away from himself, and from the creatures around him, upwards to the One Self-existent Being; Whose Power and Wisdom and Goodness know no bounds, Who ever has been and ever will be what He is now. "All things come of Thee!" Of God it comes that anything besides God exists at all. God was free to create or still to live, as He had lived from an Eternity, unsurrounded by creatures. Of God it is that whatever exists, exists as it exists, and not in some other mode or manner of existence. God was not obliged by any constraining necessity to create the particular universe in which we live, and the actual creatures which inhabit it, in the forms, numbers, kinds, varieties, which we see around us. No independent agency forced His Hand and made Him obey its behests; no pre-existing or co-existing force or matter imposed upon His activity conditions of working which He could not but obey. It is God's doing that, in this marvellous Universe, that which is most like Himself as a Spiritual Essence takes precedence of that which is less like; so that matter is subordinated to spirit, and the physical world exists for the sake of the moral; and man is invested with dominion over the works of God's Hands; and all things are put in subjection under his feet.[a] All things come of God; their being, and the modes and purpose of their being. And whether He fashions His handiwork at a single stroke, or slowly brings it to perfection through the measured movements of almost incalculable periods of time, it is always He Who furnishes the material, Who gives the impact, Who presides with an absolute control at each stage of the

[a] Ps. viii. 6.

prolonged development, and Who supplies the last touch of beauty to the highest and the fairest on earth or in Heaven. But this, the only religious estimate of the relation between the Universe and God, is not morally fruitful, does not suggest anything practical, until we apply it in detail. If this detail is commonplace, it cannot be helped; it shares this reproach with truths which yet belong to the sublimest regions of thought or faith.

"All things come of Thee!" This, then, is true, first of all, of that which was in David's mind; of material possessions; of property. Property is both originally, and as long as we hold it, the gift of God. We speak, indeed, of a man's making his fortune. And, no doubt, industrious habits, attention to the wants and tastes of the time and to the conditions under which they can be satisfied, prudence, caution, are qualities which do largely contribute towards success of this kind. They contribute to it. They cannot secure it. In every prosperous life there is an element which defies calculation; an element of unlooked-for occurrences, of favouring circumstances, of happy opportunity, which, by presenting itself, makes all the difference in the world. From the lack of it, careers which at the outset seemed full of promise, end in failure and poverty; while men from whom little might have been expected, are almost carried forward into success by some tide in affairs which has presented itself to them at a critical moment.

This element of opportunity is strictly beyond our own control. And whence comes it? We veil the reality from our own eyes and from the eyes of others when we speak of accident and chance and luck. No serious believer in God can allow that these phantoms of the brain have any real existence whatever. They are merely blinds of

our own making; and we let them down when we want to keep the light of God's Countenance from streaming in at the windows of the soul.

If a war, or a commercial depression, or a failure of the crops, or a sudden activity in some kind of foreign industry, which, as we have seen, has proved fatal to the enterprise of others, did not occur at that period of our lives when it must have brought us disappointment or ruin; this is not luck or chance. It is His Will and doing, out of Whose bounty and by the employment of Whose gifts we make our fortunes, if, indeed, we make them at all.

But, perhaps, wealth has come to us from those who have won it and left it to us. Or we long since have toiled for it, and have retired from the strain and vicissitudes of business. Now we are "independent," and all that that fascinating word implies. Independent of the freaks of fortune, as we call them; independent of the assistance and good will of our fellow-creatures; independent, so far as our income goes—we think, but do not say it—of Him Who gave it us. Are we thus independent? Is our property so secure that nothing can touch it? Do we seem to hold it, not from God, but from the well-understood and solid guarantees which are furnished by modern civilization? Surely, my friends, it is a mistake to think that the security of property has become greater as civilization has advanced. In early days, when a man kept his stock of wealth in his strong box, and buried it under the floor of an outhouse at the approach of an invader, it was not, certainly, very productive; but it was not exposed to the risks which might await it now. The immense development and organization of credit, reposing upon an extension and complexity of business of which our ancestors never dreamed, has made money do more work than of

yore, but at the greater risk of its possessor. The vast operations which require the contributions of many small fortunes in order to their being carried on at all, and which encourage these contributions by remunerative rates of interest, are themselves exposed to the shock of occurrences wholly beyond the control of those who direct, and much more of those who contribute to sustain them. Never before in the history of the world was the property of millions of persons so exposed to the destructive action of causes which in other days would only have assailed the fortunes of the great; never was the truth, that riches make themselves wings and flee away,[a] written more plainly on the very face of life; never was it more certain, for all who have eyes to see and ears to hear, that the retention of wealth is not less the work of God than its original acquisition.

"All things come of Thee!" How true is this of health, the preciousness of which we only know when we have lost or are losing it! While health lasts in its full vigour, it is often apt to produce no less forgetfulness of God than do riches. A man feels the full flush and glow of life; he is buoyant with the spirits that are produced by a sense of the harmony and vigour of the various functions of the body; the very relish of the gift seems to ensure its perpetuity; imagination cannot so forecast the future as to conceive its withdrawal. And this man walks out into the street, and buys a book which tells him how to prolong health for many years by temperate habits, and by observing the rules which protect the body against the foes of health; and, in order to encourage him, it tells him that his health is in his own power. So, to a certain extent, it is; but only to a certain extent. The secret of its collapse may be altogether beyond him. A tubercle may

[a] Prov. xxiii. 5.

have formed in his lung, an artery may have given way near his brain; and health or life is forfeited.

Considering the complexity and delicacy of the bodily organs, upon whose vigour and harmony health depends, the wonder is, not that we should lose health, but that we should so long retain it. Those who believe that God governs His own world, cannot fail to trace His Hand in that wide region of contingent circumstances by which health is so powerfully affected, and over which man himself has no control whatever. Health, too, is God's gift; and it is retained only at His good pleasure.

"All things come of Thee!" So it is with the powers of the mind: God gives them to us, and we hold them so long as He pleases, and no longer. Not a few men of great mental powers have appeared to forget that mind is a gift at all. They know how much they have done by study to develop and enrich their intellects. They are so conscious of wielding a force before which others bow down and do homage, that they cannot bring themselves to think that there is One Being in existence to Whom they owe their gift of mind, and Who might at any time withdraw it.

And yet those to whom God has given these higher endowments are not seldom reminded that they hold them upon sufferance, by discovering that they cannot exercise them entirely at will. How little is the employment of the mental powers within our control, at least during large portions of our lives! Some years, perhaps, have passed since we made a particular subject our own; by study, by reflection, by conversation with others. We laid it by, as if it was, like a book, a permanent acquisition, occupying a shelf in the mind, from which it might be taken down and examined and reproduced at pleasure. Some occasion presents itself when we find ourselves obliged to draw on

this store of long-since-acquired thought and knowledge; and we discover that we retain little more than the skeleton of our old possession. The main facts are there still; the outline survives. But all that imparted vividness and life has passed away; and we vainly endeavour to recover the warmth and colouring, the abundant and detailed interest, which once stirred our thoughts and imaginations in regard to it. So, too, with the exercise of faculties which in bygone years appeared to be completely at our command. Bishop Wilberforce used to say that, ready as he generally was, there were times when it caused him almost physical suffering to speak to order on a given subject. The subject was there, and a moderate amount of industry could master its details. But how so to deal with it as to kindle the responsive sympathy of others; how to speak from the soul, when for the moment the soul is speechless; how to be vigorous, when the mind is flabby and tame; how to move forward with ease and force, when every thought has to be extracted by a violent mechanical effort;—that was the question. There are days when we feel that the higher and more original powers of the mind are as little within our control as the weather; and the sense of this may well suggest from Whom we hold them, and how precariously. Nor is this all. A time may come to the wisest, the most thoughtful, the most brilliant of men when life will not yet have been forfeited, but when all that can be called "mind" will have ceased to live; when the bright glance of intelligence will have been replaced by a vacant stare; when the lips, upon which in old days men waited for the refined utterances of wisdom and reflection, produce nothing that is coherent or even sensible; when here and there, at best, one flash of the old fire for a moment illumines the darkness only to make the ruin

more bitterly plain. Few of us can have lived for many years without observing how the Giver of high intellect may withdraw His gift; or without reflecting, when confronted by these distressing catastrophes, how completely, from day to day, we depend on Him for its retention.

"All things come of Thee!" Need it be said that this especially applies to those powers by which our souls are raised to a higher level than unassisted Nature knows of, so that we can hold communion with the Being Who made us? Grace proceeds, as the word implies, from God's bounty. Grace is much more than favour, which might result in no form of active assistance; such a conception is unworthy of God. Grace is an operative, impelling, and controlling force, by which the understanding is enlightened to see spiritual truth, and the affections warmed to embrace spiritual beauty, and the will braced and strengthened to do that which the illuminated conscience may prescribe. Grace is, in its essence, a Divine Presence in the regenerate man; the Presence by His Spirit of the New Man Christ Jesus, Who after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.[a] And the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than the greatest[b] of the ancient Saints, because this gift of an Inward Presence has been conferred on him, through the bounty of the Redeemer and the ministrations of the Spirit in the Christian Church. Insight into great and solemn truths, the power of prayer, the resourcefulness and activity of benevolence, the sense of belonging already to an Invisible World, in which the soul breathes freely and which is to be its true and eternal home,—these are but a few of the prerogatives of the life of grace.

Grace comes from God, and when this is for a moment forgotten, how grave may be the mischief! Through this

[a] Eph. iv. 24. [b] St. Matt. xi. 11.

forgetfulness, again and again in the Christian Church. Lucifer has fallen from Heaven. The soul's eye has been withdrawn from the Giver; it has centred on itself the recipient, as if it were the rightful owner of an inalienable endowment;—and lo! the gift has vanished. The eye, that was so clear-sighted, sees nothing clearly as it is; the heart, that was so warm, is cold; the arm, that was so powerful, is paralyzed; Heaven, which was the soul's home, hangs now above it as a dark canopy; and all that corrupts and degrades has reasserted its sway over a spirit that yesterday was the companion of the angels, and, as it seemed, of the lineage of the Saints.

II.

Yes! "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." This great truth should express itself in the spirit of sacrifice, resting on the conviction that whatever we give to God is already His own. And the spirit of sacrifice is constantly engaged in a twofold activity: it is either consenting, with humble resignation, if not with glad acquiescence, to that which God exacts, or it is making some effort of its own to acknowledge the debt of which it is never forgetful. Each of these forms of sacrifice is suggested to us to-day.[a]

It is a day which, year by year, is devoted by the Church to the memory of the children who were slain by King Herod when endeavouring to destroy the Infant Christ. "The Feast of the Holy Innocents" stands third of the three festivals which follow in the Church Calendar immediately on the Birthday of our Divine Redeemer, and these three days, it has often been noticed, represent three different kinds of martyrs. St. Stephen was a martyr in

[a] Feast of the Holy Innocents.

will and also in deed; St. John the Evangelist in will but not in deed; the Holy Innocents in deed but not in will.[a] It may be said that this last can only be termed martyrdom by a forced use of language, since, properly speaking, it is essential that the witness to truth which the martyr bears should be voluntary. But, at least, the Holy Innocents did forfeit their lives for the sake of Christ. God, we may be sure, accepted the sacrifice, and has given them a place of high honour near the Throne of Him for Whom they died. And the Evangelist turns our attention to the mothers of these slaughtered babes. They remind him of their ancestress Rachel, as Jeremiah had pictured her, weeping from her cenotaph in Ramah over her unhappy descendants as they were led past it in chains to Babylon, and weeping now again from her real tomb near Bethlehem over the victims of the jealousy and rage of the Idumæan king.[b]

Yes, these mothers were called to sacrifice; they had to resign themselves to that which costs flesh and blood one of its most painful efforts. Types they were of unnumbered mothers in Christendom, whose infants God takes from their arms into His everlasting keeping; of some mothers, assuredly, who are here to day. What can a mother do, whose heart is broken by the loss of a child in whom all her hopes were centred? She can pray that she may enter into the spirit of David's words. "This infant, O Heavenly Father, was Thine; Thine by Creation; Thine, in a deeper and more perfect sense, by union with Thy Son in Baptism; and at Thy bidding I give it back to Thee. It must be better for me that Thou shouldest recall Thine own, since so Thou willest it."

Probably not a few who hear me have been called upon during the past year to give up something that was, in

[a] St. Matt. ii. 16. [b] *Ib.* 17, 18; cf. Jer. xxxi. 15.

other senses, dear to them. You may have suffered by one of those great failures of credit by which the last year and a half will be unhappily remembered; you may have exchanged plenty and ease for poverty and discomforts, of which you had no previous experience. Or you have for the first time found out what is meant by the loss of health; the changed aspect of life, the weariness by day and by night, the sense of approaching dissolution, the dread of a dark and uncertain future. And perhaps bad health has brought with it, among other things, a consciousness of impaired mental vigour, just when mental strength would be so welcome as a set-off against physical weakness. Or some great hope, centering in some object of care or affection, has for many years been cherished under difficulties, has been clung to, and has seemed likely to be realized; and now at last it has disappeared from sight, and must be abandoned for ever. Or some friend or relation, upon whose presence the brightness and comfort of life depended, has been called away. The forms of sacrifice to which God invites us are, indeed, almost as various as our several characters; the essential thing is to remember that in each one of them He is recalling, in part or wholly, His own gifts, and bidding us learn, if we may, to say—

> "If Thou shouldst call me to resign
> What most I prize—it ne'er was mine;
> I only yield Thee what is Thine;
> Thy Will be done."

"Of Thine own have we given Thee!" Besides the sacrifice of resignation, there is the sacrifice of effort.

We are still keeping the Festival of the Birth of Christ. What was that Birth but the first act of the greatest Sacrifice that ever went up to God; of the One Sacrifice which deserves the name, by which all others are measured,

and in which they find their consecration? That Sacrifice was finished on the Cross of Calvary; but, in the intention of the Divine Victim, it began before He manifested Himself in the world of sense. "When He cometh into the world, He saith, The Minchah and the burnt offering Thou wouldest not, but a Body hast Thou prepared Me: burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin hast Thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come to do Thy Will, O Lord."[a] "A Body hast Thou prepared Me." The Manhood of our Lord, His Body and His Human Soul, were created by God, when He, the Son of God, became Incarnate, through being conceived of the Holy Ghost. He folded this stainless Nature round His Eternal Person, and then He led It forth to sacrifice; so that His earthly life was a long series of sacrificial acts which ended in a death of agony and shame. When He lay in the Manger this life of sacrifice had already begun, and when He hung dying on the Cross it was being completed. In those last moments of agony and shame, He was controlling forces that seemed to be mastering Him; He was a Priest upon His Cross, and withal He was His Own Victim; He was "through the Eternal Spirit offering Himself immaculate to God."[b] His life was not wrung out of Him. When the due moment had arrived, He Himself pronounced its dismissal; He gave it up to Him Whose it was. "Father, into Thy Hands I commend My Spirit."[c]

This is the second great department of Christian effort, a willingness to make voluntary sacrifices, and on the ground that we are only giving God His own. The willingness to make such sacrifices is the true test of life in a Church. It is the true test of life in a Christian. No activity which does not involve sacrifice proves that a Church is living; no amount of interest in religion, un-

[a] Heb. x. 5-7. [b] *Ib.* ix. 14. [c] St. Luke xxiii. 46.

accompanied by the mark of sacrifice, attests the life of a soul. Willingness to do something which costs effort, and the more secretly the better; willingness to undergo something which costs pain, and the more secretly the better;—these are the fundamental tests of a true Christian life. They prove that the spirit of the Church or the man in which they are found is at one with the Spirit of the Divine Redeemer.

Should we not look back to-day upon the year which has passed with this view; and ask ourselves whether we have foregone some gain or honour, or given up some wealth, or embraced of our free will some annoyance, for His sake to Whom we owe our life in nature and in grace? And if across this tract of time we can see nothing that has on it the ennobling stamp of sacrifice, then let us at once resolve upon doing or enduring something which, whatever it be really worth, shall cost *us* much. No natural gifts, no successes, no warm feelings, no congratulations of friends, no certificates of distinction, can really ennoble a life which lacks this indispensable patent of moral nobility. We shall not long be at a loss how to obtain it, if we are serious. Love is inventive. And love is the parent of all sacrifice that deserves the name.

No doubt, on the last Sunday in the year, there is much else to claim a place in thought. Few men are so light-hearted and frivolous as to be wholly insensible to what is meant by the close of another of those periods which form a considerable portion of the longest span of human life. Few men can help feeling the solemnity of events, when measured by a quickened sense of the lapse of time. The danger is, lest, with such abundant materials for thought as the closing year suggests, nothing practical should issue from our reflections; and lest, after entertaining ourselves with a retrospective reverie,

we should be and should do exactly as before. Brethren, the close of a year is a solemn call to recognize the great truth which David confesses. Life, and all that surrounds it and belongs to it, comes from God, and is due to Him. Every true character must be salted with the spirit of sacrifice, at one while expressing itself in effort, at another in resignation. For this great purpose, life is still our own; but we know not how much or how little of it may yet be granted to us. The hours are passing, and they are put down to us; *pereunt et imputantur.* As they pass, let us try to remember that, like all else, they too come from the Eternal Being, and that, in consecrating them to Him, we are only giving to Him that which is already His own.

SERMON XIV.

THE PERISHING AND THE IMPERISHABLE.

(SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.)

ISA. XL. 8.

The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the Word of our God shall stand for ever.

THE last twenty-seven chapters of Isaiah are so unlike those which precede them that they might seem to form a separate book. The Prophet appears to live in the days of the Babylonish Captivity; he is carried by the Spirit away from the days of Hezekiah, and from his own home in Palestine; and prophesies as if he were dwelling among the exiles under a heathen king. So much is this the case that some writers, who do not believe in the possibility of really predictive prophecy, have assumed that these chapters were written by another prophet living in the midst of the scenes which are here described by anticipation, and two centuries later than the son of Amos. This opinion is not supported by critical arguments of decisive weight; and it does violence to the great unities which can be shown to run through Isaiah's work. It really rests upon an assumption contradicted by ancient as well as modern experience; that God cannot or will not distinctly reveal anything strictly future to

the human soul.[a] Isaiah, in these wonderful poems, reaches the very crown and flower of his prophetic work. They seem to be related to his earlier prophecies, as are those last words of Moses, uttered in the highlands of Moab, and embodied in Deuteronomy, to the earlier writings of the great Lawgiver; as is the last Discourse in the Supper-room[b] to the earlier teaching of the Incarnate Word. In this splendid climax of his work the Prophet is very far from confining himself to the future needs, or sufferings, or triumphs of his countrymen. He begins with a prophecy which furnishes the Baptist with the theme of his preaching;[c] he proclaims the sufferings and triumph of Messiah as clearly as if he had stood beneath the Cross;[d] he describes the creation of a new Heavens and a new earth[e] with a clearness which, to say the least, is not surpassed in the Apocalypse. The text is uttered by the second of two voices, spoken to Isaiah as if out of the world of spirits, at the beginning of this, the final, series of his prophecies.

"Hark, one is speaking, 'Cry.'
And he answers, 'What shall I cry?'
'All flesh is grass,
And all the beauty thereof as the flower of the field.
The grass withereth,
The flower fadeth:
Because the Breath of the Lord
Has blown upon it.
Surely the people is grass.
The grass withereth,
The flower fadeth:
Yet the Word of our God will stand for ever.'"[f]

[a] Cf. Delitzsch, on Isaiah: preliminary observations on ch. xl.–lxvi., who quotes Windischmann, *Zoroastr. Stud.*, p. 137, on the prediction of Cyrus by name 210 years before his birth. Cf. also Pusey, *Daniel the Prophet*, 3rd edit., p. 124. Dr. Pusey used to say that the only serious reason for denying the unity of Isaiah was the revelation of the name of Cyrus in xliv. 28.

[b] St. John xiii.–xvii. [c] Comp. Isa. xl. 3–5; St. Luke iii. 3–6.
[d] Isa. liii.; lxiii. [e] *Ib.* lxv. 17–25. [f] *Ib.* xl. 6–8.

I.

Now, the immediate purpose of these words is to reassure the Jews of the Captivity. There they were in Babylon, as Isaiah saw them across the centuries, far from their home, surrounded by the imposing fabric of a great Empire, crushed into silent submission by its power, awed, at times half-fascinated, by its splendour. It seemed so much more solid, so much more lasting than the monarchy of David had been; they could not think that it would perish. In truth, outside Egypt, all that was then possible in material civilization was apparently concentrated in the valley of the Euphrates. When Isaiah wrote it had been a seat of empire for some three thousand years. But the great king who was to make it what it was when the Jews visited it as captives, was not yet living in the days of Isaiah; although he had lived and died before the days for which Isaiah wrote. Probably no other ruler of men has left behind him such vast architectural works as did King Nebuchadnezzar. Both the ancient ruins and the modern towns of Babylonia are mainly constructed with his bricks. Besides rebuilding the walls and restoring the temples which had come down from an earlier age, he raised that splendid palace which, with its plated pillars, its sumptuous decoration with enamelled tiles, its hanging gardens, its triple enclosure, was regarded as one of the wonders of the ancient world. Babylon itself was surrounded by a wall, according to the lowest trustworthy estimate forty-two miles in length, and three hundred feet high;[a] that is to say, only sixty feet lower than the cross of St. Paul's. The area which was thus enclosed would, no doubt, have been

[a] So Ctesias, who, like Herodotus, saw Babylon. The latter makes the circuit of the wall fifty-six miles.

partly filled by orchards and gardens; but it contained a vast population. Besides the great palace already referred to, there was the enormous temple of Belus; a species of pyramid, composed of eight square towers placed one above another; each side of the basement tower being more than two hundred yards in length. There was another palace, on the west of the Euphrates, enclosed within a single wall of three and a half miles in circumference, and connected with the larger one, not only by the bridge, but by a tunnel under the Euphrates. The rest of the city would have been on a corresponding scale; and it is needless to say that nothing like it was to be seen on the coasts of the Mediterranean, or, indeed, anywhere in the Western world.

It was to men whose eyes were resting on this scene of magnificence and power that Isaiah spoke, out of another land and an earlier age, the solemn words, "All flesh is grass, and all the beauty thereof as the flower of the field."[a] The simile is elsewhere used by Isaiah himself in his message to Hezekiah, to describe the completeness of the destruction of the Jewish towns by the Assyrian Sennacherib's invading army.

> "Their inhabitants were men of small power.
> . . . . .
> They were as the grass of the field,
> And as the green herb,
> As the grass on the housetops,
> And as corn blasted before it is grown up."[b]

Was it conceivable that the metaphor which so aptly described the collapse of some petty Jewish towns before the advance of a power which Babylon herself had since humbled to the dust, could be truly applied to what was to befall the city, and throne, and people of Nebuchad-

[a] Isa. xl. 6. [b] 2 Kings xix. 26.

nezzar? Often as they gazed on the mighty temple, the splendid palaces, above all, on the gigantic walls of the empire city, it must, we think, have occurred to the Jewish captives that if the Prophet had actually beheld the city of their conquerors, he would have faltered in his prediction. Babylonians might die, but Babylon would live. Those vast populations would not really disappear, that splendid civilization would not really perish. Nevertheless it was to pass away. Isaiah even foresaw the capture of Babylon by a Medo-Persian army.[a] We know from the Book of Daniel that it occurred during a revel held by Belshazzar, whom his father Nabonidus had left to defend the city.[b] The Persians entered by the bed of the Euphrates, and Belshazzar was slain. From that event the gradual ruin of Babylon dates. Its walls were partly dismantled, and partly allowed to fall into ruin. The long period of peace which the Persian Empire enjoyed between Xerxes and Darius Codomannus was a period of progressive decay; and after the conquest of Persia by Alexander, the city ceased to be in any sense a seat of empire; it became, in fact, for many centuries a mere quarry, which supplied the materials for building Seleucia, Ctesiphon, Bagdad, Hillah. The modern traveller tells us that the "beauty of the Chaldee's excellency" has "become heaps;" that her walls have "fallen," been "thrown down," and "broken utterly;" that the very site is a wilderness; that the "wild beasts of the desert lie there," and "the owls dwell there;" that the natives regard the site as haunted by evil spirits, so that "neither will the Arab pitch tent, nor the shepherd fold sheep there;"[c] that, in a word, prophecy has been literally fulfilled. The beauty of human

[a] Isa. xxi. 1–10. [b] Dan. v. 30, 31.

[c] Layard's *Nineveh and Babylon*, cxxii.; Ker Porter's *Travels*, vol. ii.; Professor Rawlinson, in Smith's *Dict. Bible*, *s.v.*

life in this, for many centuries, its princely centre, was, after all, but "as the flower of the field." "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth."

And, even had it been otherwise, and Babylon had been chartered with the promise of eternal youth, Babylonians would have died one after another. That outward form of man's life, which we name civilization, and which exerts so immense an empire over our imaginations, does not count for much in the true life of man. The individual man would still be as the grass which withereth, even if the political society to which he belonged were strictly imperishable. In this respect there was no difference between the courtiers of Nebuchadnezzar and the broken-hearted captives who, by the waters of Babylon, sat down and wept when they remembered Sion.[a]

In contrast with the perishing life of the great Empire city and its vast populations, Isaiah points to "the Word of our God." That Word, he says, will "stand for ever." While man, living in the flesh, with his finite being, his limited powers, his decaying strength, recalls the withering grass and the fading flower, the Word of our God rises up like corn in the ear, and is, as it were, embodied before the spiritual eye of man; it neither fades nor withers; it endures for ever; it justifies itself at the bar of history and throughout all time. By "the Word of our God" Isaiah means, in the first instance, the Word of promise uttered in the desert by the inspired Voice.[b] The promise of the return from Babylon, the promise of the presence of Israel's Redeemer, would be fulfilled. The conquerors and oppressors of Israel would pass away. With this imperishable Word of God Israel may comfort himself in his captive hours. The hour of Babylon's fall would be the hour of Israel's liberty. The promise of

[a] Ps. cxxxvii. 1. [b] Isa. xl. 2.

deliverance rested on a Will more durable than the walls of Babylon, more invincible than the hosts of Nebuchadnezzar. Whatever present appearances might be; however great the might of Babylon, however few and feeble the heralds of the Divine Word; the one was human, and therefore transient, the other eternal because Divine.

II.

St. Peter detaches this text from its historical setting, and gives it a universal application. When he reminds Christians that they are born again, and that a regenerate man has a new life and a new standard of duty before him, he adds that this new birth has been effected, "not by corruptible seed, but by incorruptible, by the Word of God, that liveth and abideth for ever."[a] And then he goes on to quote Isaiah with such variations as Apostles, conscious of their own inspiration, often felt at liberty to make when citing the Old Testament. "All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the Word of the Lord endureth for ever. And," adds St. Peter, as if to prevent the quotation from suggesting nothing but historical or antiquarian lessons to his readers, "this is the Word which by the Gospel is preached unto you."[b]

This wider application of the simile occurs already in Job, whose words are so familiar to us from their place in the Burial Service.

> "Man that is born of woman
> Is of few days, and full of trouble.
> He cometh forth as a flower, and is cut down."[c]

[a] 1 St. Pet. i. 23. [b] *Ib.* 24, 25. [c] Job xiv. 1, 2.

And, again, in the Psalm of Moses; also a part of the Burial Service.

> "As soon as thou scatterest men,
> They are even as a sleep,
> And fade away suddenly like the grass.
> In the morning it is green and groweth up;
> But in the evening it is cut down,
> Dried up, and withered." [a]

The simile has a twofold force. It justifies, at first sight, and to a certain extent, the sympathy with human life, with its freshness, variety, beauty, which was felt by captive Israel. What is more beautiful than a single blade of grass, if we look steadily at it, and do not put our foot on it, only because, as has been said, "there are millions of other blades of grass close by"? There it is, waving gently in the wind, inimitable in its subtle and delicate texture, in its grace, its movement. Do what we will, we cannot reproduce that blade of grass, we cannot even make a copy of it; it is as much beyond our skill as the sun himself. And how mysterious a thing is this blade of grass! When we cross-question ourselves, and have put aside the superficial trivialities that occur to us at first, what do we really know about it? How did it come to be there? It grew from a seed. Why should it grow? What do we mean by "growth"? What growth is in itself we know not; but we can understand that it is a subtle and energetic force which a granite mountain, for instance, does not contain within itself, and which makes the blade of grass a much higher thing in the scale of being than is the granite mountain. We may think little of growth because we are so familiar with it. But growth, wherever we find it, is a profound mystery; it implies the active energy of life. We men,

[a] Ps. xc. 5, 6.

whatever we have besides, share this faculty of growth with the humblest blade of grass on which we tread; and we are very far from being dishonoured when our life is compared to a thing so full of wonder and beauty.

But Isaiah undoubtedly refers to the grass as an emblem of the perishable and the perishing. In looking at it we look on what is at best a vanishing form, ready, almost ere it is mature, to be resolved into its elements, and to sink back into the soil whence it grew. "The Breath of the Lord," says the Prophet, "has blown upon it."[a] The action of God the Creator upon the world is, in the Old Testament, often ascribed to His Breath or Spirit pervading His works, and creating, sustaining, destroying life.[b] Of this the emblem and manifestation is the wind; the heavy breathing, as it were, of nature. The Breath of God is, then, in such passages as this, God's action upon nature, whether to create or to destroy; and Isaiah insists that death does not overtake either animals or herbs simply in consequence of the chemical solvents which they contain, but because He Who, in His freedom, gave the gift of life, now withdraws freely what He gave; because He dissolves, as He created, by an act of His Will. According to the Prophet, death, in its calmest and in its most terrible forms, is always arresting life by the fiat of God. "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, because the Breath of the Lord hath blown upon it."[c] Nor is this truth at variance with the chemistry of animal life. Death has a physical, as well as a religious and metaphysical, side. We are not concerned to ignore the one because we insist upon the other. In any case, and however it may be brought about, it is the act of God, whether in the case of the blade of grass,

[a] Isa. xl. 7. [b] Gen. ii. 7; 2 Sam. xxii. 16; Job xxxiii. 4; Isa. xi. 4.
[c] Isa. xl. 7.

or of the Christian; and in neither case will it be long deferred. "As soon as we were born," says the wise man, "we began to draw to our end."[a] That is true of the highest and lowest forms of natural life. Whatever else human life is, or may imply, it is soon over; "it fades away suddenly like the grass." This is a truth of experience; it is altogether beyond the region of controversy. The world may have made great progress since the days of our fathers and grandfathers. We may have better government, larger and more widely diffused knowledge, better and juster laws, a larger amount of happiness for the greater number. Let us thank God for it. But the frontiers of life do not change with the generations, as do its attendant circumstances. We are born, and we die, just as did our rudest ancestors; and there is no probability, in the mind of any reasonable man, that our science or anything else will, or ever can, alter the fundamental conditions of our existence. We see that, as a matter of fact, death has a universal empire. We follow first one friend, then another, to the grave. We know that we every one of us shall die. "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth." It is not a jet of sentiment; it is a solemn law; true at this moment; always true.

"But the Word of the Lord"—in St. Peter's sense of the term as well as Isaiah's—"endureth for ever." How do we know that? Certainly, not in the same way that we know the universality of death. We know it to be true if we believe two things; first, that God, the Perfect Moral Being, exists; secondly, that He has spoken to man. If He is Eternal, that which He proclaims as His Truth and Will will bear on it the mark of His Eternity; if He is true, that which He speaks will bear the impress of His Faithfulness. It is not possible, in the case of the

[a] Wisd. v. 13.

Perfect Being, to distinguish between the worth of His Word and His Nature, as it is sometimes in the case of an imperfect being like man. That, having created us, He would speak to us, is an anticipation of the human soul. That He has spoken is a matter of historical fact, and it may be discussed like any other fact of history. He has always spoken, although less clearly, to the human conscience. The distinction between right and wrong is His Word in the soul of man; His unchanging Word. It is eternally true; it stands for ever. Isaiah was thinking of all that He had said, through many ages, to Israel. But the Life, the teaching, the miracles, above all, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, afford proof to us Christians that God has not left us to ourselves; that we are not in the dark as to the great and awful problems which surround our existence. The Love and Justice of God; the reality of a life to come, and of a future judgment; the Incarnation of the Eternal Son of God, Who was manifested in human form in this sphere of sense and time; His Atoning Death upon the Cross; His Life in Glory at the Right Hand of the Father; the possibility and the reality of communion with Him, through faith, love, prayer, on our part, through the gift of the Divine Spirit and of the Sacraments on His,—these are truths which, for Christians, do not decay. When they are not matters of human history, they rest upon the authority of the Unchanging God. "O Lord, Thy Word endureth for ever in Heaven. Thy Truth also remaineth from one generation to another." [a]

Depend on it, brethren, while all else is giving way around us, there is one thing that does not alter. It is what it was when we were young; it is what it will be when we are laid in our graves, and when others shall

[a] Ps. cxix. 89, 90.

have taken our places. The Word of God, speaking to conscience, speaking in Revelation, is throned, like God Himself, above the water-flood[a] of change. It lasts. Our outward circumstances are continually varying; our friends, our occupations, our interests, may be so altogether new that at times we seem to be living new lives. But the Word of God is what it was; it lasts. The substance of our bodies is said to disappear and be replaced in every seven years, and it is certain that we are constantly entering upon new phases of health or of decrepitude. Meanwhile the Divine Word endures without decay or loss. Our minds are changing yet more rapidly than our bodies; the stock of thought and feeling which they contain is not exactly the same for any two hours consecutively. But the utterance of Him Who changes not, ever remains. Men differ from each other about God's Word; they exaggerate this element in it and forget that; they attribute to their own changes of thought respecting it a permanent and objective value; as though the Divine and Absolute Truth could share the vicissitudes of what is relative and human. But it remains what it was; hidden, it may be, like the sun in December, behind the clouds of speculation, or the clouds of controversy, but in itself ever unchanged, unchangeable. "Thy Word, O Lord, endureth for ever in Heaven."

On the last Sunday in the year, we naturally fall back on such thoughts as these; thoughts which are not cancelled by the exulting joy of the Christmas Festival. We pass to-day one of the milestones on the road of life. Since this occasion last year some of us probably feel, by sensible proof, that the end is nearer than it was. We are conscious that we can do less, or endure less than

[a] Ps. xxix. 9.

we could. We have less vital force to fall back upon. Our faculties are less at command; we cannot depend upon our memories, or see our way through difficulties, or bear the shock of disappointments as we could. "The corruptible body presseth down the soul;"[a] and the body is evidently giving way. A day comes to thousands of people every year, which brings to them, for the first time, with the force of experimental knowledge, the conviction that their earthly body is on its way to dissolution; that the weakness or disease which will kill it at no distant date is already at work; that they are not far from the hour when the eye of sense will close for ever on all that this world is and contains. To some, probably, who hear me this past year has, for the first time, brought this conviction; to others, it will come in the year which is on the point of opening. "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth."

Those who are young, or hale and strong, and in high spirits, and are not conscious of a sentence of death in themselves, may read this solemn truth in the world around. How many are the names which on this day last year stood high in the public life of England or of Europe, and are now numbered with the dead! Since then the Emperor upon whose lightest words Europe had hung for almost twenty years with breathless anxiety, has died in a Kentish village close to this metropolis, surrounded only by his family and the few friends of his fallen fortunes.[b] Since then the thinker and writer who has made Bentham a popular power, and who, amid whatever errors (and I have no wish to extenuate their seriousness, though I hope and pray that they were

[a] Wisd. ix. 15.

[b] The Emperor Napoleon III. died at Chislehurst, Jan. 9, 1873.

largely the product of circumstances beyond his control), has contributed much to the mental enterprise of Englishmen, has left us to discover the real limits of a philosophy of experience.[a] Since then the acute judge, whose professional knowledge was only exceeded by his humour, or at least by his general capacity, has gone to his account.[b] On the way he all but met, at the very gate of Eternity, the Prelate[c] to whom he had been so often opposed; the first, at the time of his death, of English Prelates; the man who, by the common consent of men, for the manifoldness of his gifts and his intrepid devotion to work, stood alone among those who filled the high places of the Church, and has left behind him none who even distantly approach him. What a comment was that death upon the Prophet's estimate of life; nay, rather, how does the reality outdo the metaphor! There was no gradual decay, no withering of the physical form, no fading of the mental powers; but in one moment, as if by a flash, he passed, without a sign, from the full energy and interest of this life into the scenes and silence of the next. And many others there are; the novelist, whose works have, with varying results, contributed to stimulate and guide the imaginations of our time;[d] the accomplished traveller in the Levant;[e] the late Speaker of the House of Commons;[f] the eminent architect,[g] so closely connected with this city, and, as I am bound to remember, with the completion of this Cathedral; the

[a] Mr. J. Stuart Mill died May 9, 1873.

[b] Lord Westbury died July 20, 1873.

[c] Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Winchester, died by a fall from his horse near Guildford, July 19, 1873.

[d] Lord Lytton died Jan. 18, 1873.

[e] Lord Zouche, better known as the Hon. R. Curzon, died Aug. 2, 1873.

[f] Viscount Ossington died March 8, 1873.

[g] Sir W. Tite died April 20, 1873.

great banker;[a] the painter,[b] whose genius has made the animal world so familiar to us, and whose name is a household word in many an English household; the young statesman[c] of high promise, who died a fortnight since—a martyr, they say, to conscientious work—on a foreign soil. It would take long to complete the list; but we cannot, at least, forget to-day that, one short week ago, one of our brethren,[d] who for forty-four years had led the service of God in the choir of this Cathedral Church, passed away from us; and if, as was natural, he represented the traditions of a past generation rather than the hopes of our own, we shall long remember him for his simplicity of character, for his fearless honesty, for his unaffected benevolence. Oh! how difficult is it to realize, and yet how certainly is it true, that they have really left us; that they are no more to this world and to its active interests than are those who belong to the earliest ages of man's history. Truly, we need not look far around us to see that "the grass withereth, the flower fadeth."

And in private life, how many, how great, how irreparable in some cases, are the losses! Here it is a parent; there a wife or a husband; in another case an only child; in another, some gentle and gifted friend, whose bright and unselfish life was the warmth and illumination of our own. Sometimes the blow has fallen suddenly; sometimes it has been foreseen for months or years; but as we think of a short year ago, when our home was still unvisited by the Angel of Death, when our heart was still unlacerated by the wound which has made it bleed so

[a] Thomas Baring, Esq., M.P., died Nov. 18, 1873.

[b] Sir Edwin Landseer died Oct. 1, 1873.

[c] Mr. Henry Selfe Winterbotham, M.P., Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, died at Rome, Dec. 13, 1873.

[d] The Rev. James Lupton, M.A., Minor Canon of St. Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey, died Dec. 21, 1873.

continuously—how vast is the difference! How great are those sorrows; great as revealers of the true conditions of existence, great as teachers of the highest truths! "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth;" but life would be unendurable were it otherwise. "The Word of our God shall stand for ever."

And, therefore, on a day like this, the question for all of us is, What is the object of my thoughts, hopes, affections, conduct? Is it this perishing life, which must so soon have vanished like a dream, and which is perpetually changing; or is it the unchanging, eternal Word, which liveth and abideth for ever? Let each ask himself, Am I groping after shadows which dissolve under my very touch, or am I grasping, or at least trying to grasp, the Alone Imperishable? Am I laying up for myself "treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal;"[a] or am I laying up for myself, through the Atoning Blood and the Mighty Grace of the Redeemer, "treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal"?[b] That great question between the temporal and the Eternal, between the fascinations of this world and the solid claims of the next, between the grass which withers and the Word which endures, must be answered, and can only be answered by every man in the sanctuary of his own heart and conscience. But it is the question which ought to take precedence of any other on a day like this; a day which marks for every one of us the close of another stage in our brief journey across the fields of time towards the gate of the Eternal World.

[a] St. Matt. vi. 19. [b] *Ib.* 20.

SERMON XV.

THE LORD OUR REFUGE.

(SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.)

PS. XC. 1.

Lord, Thou hast been our Refuge from one generation to another.

THIS is, beyond doubt, the oldest Psalm in the Psalter; it is the work, not of David, but, as the inscription in the Bible Version tells us, of Moses, the great Law-giver. The contents of the Psalm, closely examined, bear out the inscription; we have here the old language, and many of the peculiar phrases, of the Books of Moses, and especially of Deuteronomy. Moreover, the spirit of the Psalm recalls Moses, the man of God. The awe at God's greatness contrasted with man's insignificance; the deep insight into the meaning of God's chastisements; the pathetic, sorrowful sense of the shortness of man's average life; the passionate prayer for more light, more spiritual wisdom, while contemplating the work and ways of God;—these are all what we might expect from Moses, as we know him in his own books. Especially like Moses is the union of melancholy and fervour which meets us here; the fervour of the intrepid servant of God tinged by the melancholy which followed on his great disappointments. Do we not hear the voice of

Israel's leader, at the close of the long and penal wanderings in the desert, in such words as these?—

> "We consume away in Thy displeasure,
> And are afraid at Thy wrathful indignation.
> Thou hast set our misdeeds before Thee,
> And our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance.
> For when Thou art angry all our days are gone:
> We bring our years to an end, as a tale that is told." [a]

Is it not Moses who, almost within sight of Canaan, prays, "Comfort us again after the time that Thou hast plagued us, and for the years wherein we have suffered adversity;" [b] and then, in view of the Divine sentence of exclusion from the promised land, checks himself—"Show Thy servants Thy work, and their children Thy glory"? [c] And are not the opening words of the Psalm, which are before us in the text, such as we might expect from this mighty soul, turning away from the checkered scenes of a career full of triumph and of failure; turning resolutely towards the One Eternal Being, before Whom all earthly things are poor and insignificant: "Lord, Thou hast been our Refuge from one generation to another. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever the earth and the world were made, Thou art God from everlasting, and world without end"? [d]

Moses is not thinking of himself alone; he associates with himself all true servants of God around him. "Lord, Thou hast been *our* Refuge." He is not, for the moment, within the frontiers of Israel. God had been served in ages when Israel as yet was not. Upon all the earliest fathers of the human race, whose names had or had not been preserved in the Sacred Books as servants of the Most High; upon all the lonely, hard, heroic lives which had been lived in those earliest days, true to the faint

[a] Ps. xc. 7-9. [b] *Ib.* 15. [c] *Ib.* 16. [d] *Ib.* 1, 2.

light of the earliest revelation;—upon these, too, the Lawgiver's thought is resting. Associated with these, not less than with the Israel of his own day, he places himself in the Presence of the All-merciful. The Lord had been the Refuge of these ancient souls from one generation to another. Moses is the representative and spokesman of all that is good and great in the past annals of mankind; he is speaking for the living; he is also speaking for the dead. And his words do not die with himself. One after another the generations take them up, first in Israel, and then in Christendom. As the centuries pass, the chorus which repeats them is ever becoming more numerous and varied; the spiritual experience which they attest is continually wider and deeper; they are repeated at this hour by more souls in earth and Heaven than ever before; by happy souls which have found in them the secret of strength and peace, whether in struggle or in victory: "Lord, Thou hast been our Refuge from one generation to another."

Many of us will chiefly remember this Psalm in connection with some of the most solemn moments of our lives. It is one of the two Psalms used in the Order for the Burial of the Dead. And of the two, we may dare to say that it pierces more completely to the inmost springs of feeling; it unveils more of the meaning and awfulness of life and death. Those moments, sooner or later, await us all when we are committing to the dust the form which we have known and loved best on earth, and when the trivialities, which, during so large a part of our existence, shroud from us the seriousness of life, have fallen away, and we are standing face to face with life's real conditions. At such moments the words may have a meaning unperceived before: "Lord, Thou hast been our Refuge from one generation to another."

I.

"Lord, Thou hast been our Refuge!" In the Authorized Version, it is, more accurately, "our Dwelling-place."[a] God is the Home of the soul of man. As Moses said in his blessing on Israel, "The Eternal God is thy Refuge, and underneath are the Everlasting Arms;"[b] words in which we find the double idea of protection and endearing welcome. No doubt a man's home is a refuge from the wind and the rain, from the cares and conflicts of the outer world, from the hard words and deeds of others. The inviolability of home is the spirit of our English proverb, that a man's house is his castle. And in this sense God is the Home of the soul; the soul finds in the Presence of God a protection against the enemies which threaten it with ruin in the rough life of the world. In this sense David cries, "I will love Thee, O Lord, my Strength; the Lord is my Stony Rock, and my Defence; my Saviour, the God of my might, in Whom I will trust; my Buckler, the Horn also of my salvation, and my Refuge."[c] Or again, "Be Thou my Strong Rock, and House of Defence, that Thou mayest save me. For Thou art my Strong Rock, and my Castle."[d] Or, again, "Be Thou my Strong Hold, whereunto I may alway resort: Thou hast promised to help me; for Thou art my House of Defence, and my Castle."[e] Once more, "Whoso dwelleth under the defence of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say unto the Lord, Thou art my Refuge, and my Strong Hold: my God, in Him will I trust. For He shall deliver thee from the snare of the hunter, and from the noisome

[a] מָעוֹן. [b] Deut. xxxiii. 27. [c] Ps. xviii. 1.
[d] *Ib.* xxxi. 3, 4. [e] *Ib.* lxxi. 2.

pestilence. He shall defend thee under His wings, and thou shalt be safe under His feathers: His faithfulness and truth shall be thy Shield and Buckler."[a]

On the other hand, besides this idea of protection from evils without, the word suggests a place where care is thrown aside, while the affections expand themselves freely and fully, and loving looks and kindly words and gentle deeds are the order of the day. When God is said to be the Refuge or Home of man, it is meant that God offers man His best and tenderest welcome; that in God, and God alone, man finds that which yields perfect repose and satisfaction to all the pure and tender sympathies of his nature. For man's higher or spiritual self the One Eternal Being is what the fireside represents to the heart's affections; a sphere in which man may abandon himself to perfect enjoyment, to that unrestrained delight which accompanies a sense of being among friends, with whom reserve is neither necessary nor possible.

Compare this idea of the relation between God and the human soul, with the three fundamental relations in which we stand to Him as our Maker, our Preserver, and the End or Object of our existence.

God is our Creator, the Author of our being. "It is He Which hath made us, and not we ourselves."[b] And, as our Maker, He has an absolute right to do what He wills with us. God is our Preserver. He upholds us in existence during each moment of our life; if He were to withdraw His Hand, we should fall back into the nothingness out of which He has taken us. God is the End or Object of our being. As we spring into being at His creative touch, so we are bound to struggle towards Him; to make Him and His Will the aim of our existence; since, apart from Him, there is no reason why we should exist

[a] Ps. xci. 1-4. [b] *Ib.* c. 2.

at all. "Of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things, to Whom be glory for ever. Amen."[a] These are the awful frontiers which bound our life; the Love of God, which bids us exist; the Love of God, which perpetuates our existence; the Love of God, which draws us by a moral attraction, but not by any necessity or compulsion, towards Himself as the Object and End of our existence. But here, in this word "Refuge," we have another and much more tender relation of God to the human soul. He Who bade us be; He Who keeps us in being; He towards Whom our being should tend, is also our true and lasting Abiding-place; He is to us that which no other being can be; He is the One Being within Whose Life we can find and make an imperishable home; He is for all faithful spirits among the sons of men, though living in diverse ages, climes, countries, civilizations, the One Being in Whom perfect repose and satisfaction is attainable. "Thou shalt hide them privily in Thine own Presence from the provoking of all men: Thou shalt keep them secretly in Thy tabernacle from the strife of tongues;"[b] "With Thee is the Well of Life: and in Thy Light we shall see Light."[c]

Thus the great Lawgiver looks around him on the men of his own day; he glances back at generations which have passed away; he calls to mind the experience of the holy dead; he takes account of generations yet unborn, and he cries, "Lord, Thou hast been our Refuge;" "Daily have our enemies been at hand to swallow us up: for they be many that fight against us, O Thou Most Highest."[d] But in Thee we find a sure Defence; the walls of a Castle, yet also the comforts and tenderness of a Home. Frail creatures of Thy Hand; pensioners, moment by

[a] Rom. xi. 36.
[b] Ps. xxxi. 22.
[c] *Ib.* xxxvi. 9.
[d] *Ib.* lvi. 2.

moment, on Thy unmerited bounty; each day that we live we are moving on towards Thee, as to the Final Cause of our existence, that by Thy mercy we may in Thee attain an endless rest. But even now Thou art to us the Home of our hearts. In Thee we enjoy that which can nowhere else be found; peace and joy for our wearied spirits; draughts of that Well of Life, which is Thine own Eternal Love.

II.

Some may, perhaps, be disposed to think that, after all, this is only old-world language, which has been true to men in bygone days, but is no longer true to us. The conditions of our life are so different from theirs. If the Middle Ages have passed and gone, what shall we say of the age of David, of the age of Moses? Life is altogether another thing to us men in the nineteenth century; it is so exacting, so positive, so many-sided, that this concentrated intensity upon spiritual interests, which was natural in earlier times, is, we may think, no longer possible. "The conditions of life"—that is the phrase—"are altogether different."

Here is an ambiguous expression, which we must take to pieces if we are to do it justice. If by "the conditions of life" be meant life's outward surroundings, or even the varying phases of human thought, the saying may pass muster. These things are constantly changing, in obedience to man's enterprise and skill. Man's power over nature, within certain frontiers, is continually becoming greater; he is constantly learning to make the most of his resources by wise government, by national associations and undertakings, by scientific appliances. It is difficult for some of the younger among us to under-

stand that they are only the grandchildren or great-grandchildren of men who had not merely no telegraphs and railroads, but also no gas and no steamboats; and they find it still less easy to connect themselves with ancestors not many generations before, who never imagined such a thing as a newspaper, and never saw a printed book. What a change there is in human life between the England of the Plantagenets and the England of Elizabeth; what a still greater change between the England of Elizabeth and that of George III.; what a change, greatest of all, between the England of George III. and the England of Victoria! Nor does this change extend only to the outward circumstances and embellishments of life. It is not less remarkable in habits and moods of thought and feeling. When we have, perhaps, discovered a packet of letters belonging to members of our own family two or three generations ago, and observe how precise and stiff were their habits of thought, and how quaint and formal their phrases, and how different their whole way of looking at ordinary things from that which is natural to ourselves, we seem to be living in another world. Everything is so strangely different; almost everything, so we think, has improved so vastly since their time, that we forget what it is that we and they have in common; what it is that they themselves shared with earlier ancestors, from whom they seemed to differ no less than do we from them; what it is that is common to us and to the remotest generations who will follow us.

My friends, the leading conditions of human life do not change. We are born into the world just as were our earliest and rudest forefathers. We leave it as certainly as they did, often perhaps with rather more suffering than less, because our science has enabled us slightly to prolong life under conditions which would have been fatal

in a ruder age. Our hold upon life depends, in the main, on the same rules and laws as did theirs. Practically the frontiers of life remain what they were; none of our inventions, none of our improvements, no part of our progress, scientific or social, has really done anything to enlarge them. The great discovery which should provide an escape from physical death, is just as far out of our reach at this hour as it was when Cæsar conquered Britain.

And, as a consequence of this constancy in the leading conditions of human existence, the relations of man to God are constant too. Now and then, in moments of passing excitement and illusion, men speak as if they could do without God; as if He were only part of the mental furniture of a past age, and had been left behind in the distance of history; as if they were in some sense degraded by dependence on an unseen Being, Who holds the key to the secret of their destiny. But this kind of language will not bear the wear and tear of reflection, or of discussion. The most ancient of all Beings is also the most modern. "I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last."[a] And man does not lose anything by confessing himself dependent on the Maker and Ruler of the Universe. Nothing but a proof that God does not exist, will prevent the best and wisest of men to the end of time from seeking the Source of all that they are and have in His inexhaustible Life. "Lord, Thou hast been our Home." This is the spirit of the noblest occupation in which we can engage; it is the spirit of prayer. This acknowledgment underlies all the forms which the soul's intercourse with God is wont to take. Whether it be intercession for others, or praise of God's attributes, or thanksgiving for past mercies, or petition

[a] Rev. xxii. 13.

for new graces; whether it be common or private; whether it be expressed in stately liturgies, or breathed in thoughts and feelings which are beyond language; whether it be an active exertion of the soul's spiritual power, or a tranquil contemplation of the One Eternal Being,—prayer is always, in its broadest sense, an act by which man in seeking God seeks his true Home and Resting-place. And therefore prayer always ennobles man, not less now than in the early days of his history. Now, as then, man is the better for recognizing the real conditions of his existence. God is not less necessary to us than He was to our savage forefathers. Our gilded civilization is no protection against misery and degradation; against the changes and chances which are the lot of all in this mortal life. The realities of life force us to look beyond it; and we cry with Moses, "Lord, Thou hast been our Refuge from one generation to another."

III.

~~To-day~~ Yesterday we ~~have almost~~ reached one of those landmarks on the road of life which few men pass without some thought. A year does not count for much in the history of a world. But it counts for a great deal in the longest human life; its issues cannot but be of lasting importance. And to have done with it, and ~~be on the point of laying it, as in a few hours, we shall~~ lay it, in its grave, is a solemn thing for all who feel what this life is, and who consider what may lie beyond it.

Certainly, time moves at the same rate all the year round; and the divisions by which we mark its progress, if they have their grounds in Nature, are, in their form, more or less artificial. But the fact to which they call attention is independent of us. Time passes, whether

we think of it or not. We cannot always be thinking of it. And therefore it is well that now and then, at definite intervals, we should be compelled to think of the flight of time, since we may draw from the thought new motives for making the best of the days which may yet remain to us.

Time, as it flies, certainly does bring with it that which, sooner or later, should force us to turn our hearts to God. It brings with it, to some, sickness, to others, sorrow, to others, sin; sooner or later, it brings with it, to all, the last scene of all. It brings death.

Since this day last year some of you, perhaps, have learnt what has been for you a new experience; you have been in broken health. Until last January, you never knew what it was to feel ill. You knew others who were ill; you saw what the human frame might have to go through, and could go through, on this side the grave, in the case of men and women around you. But it never came practically home to you. You were, as you thought, perfectly sound: your chest, your limbs, your breathing, your powers of taking sleep and taking exercise, were unimpaired. You relished life, but you took health as a matter of course; you had a feeling—without, of course, putting it into words—that you might go on for ever. At the beginning of this year it appeared that, during the preceding twelve months, you had been as well as during any year before it. You did not see why all should not continue to be as it had been. But since then there has been a change. Something has given way; some organic mischief has revealed itself. It is heart, or lungs, or, perhaps, brain; the physical mechanism of life is out of gear. True, you may be patched up; you may go on for some time; you may pay a tax of some sort to buy off for awhile

the enemy which threatens mischief. But now you know and feel that you exist in this world on new conditions; you exist, physically speaking, not by right, but on sufferance. Any sudden change of weather, any sudden shock, any large demand upon your remaining stock of strength, might be the messenger of death. You cannot be sure of yourself from day to day. You scarcely venture to look beyond the day into the weeks and months and years of coming time.

And during the first phase of a new state of health like this, you are probably inclined to fret and chafe against it. You look back regretfully to the strength, and activity, and enterprise, and freedom from pain, and fresh, joyous, bounding life of former years. You ask whether it has really gone for ever. You sigh, with the sick King Hezekiah in this afternoon's Lesson—

> "I said in the cutting off of my days,
> I shall go to the gates of the grave:
> I am deprived of the residue of my years.
> . . . . . .
> Mine age is departed,
> And is removed from me as a shepherd's tent:
> I have cut off like a weaver my life:
> He will cut me off with pining sickness:
> From day even to night wilt Thou make an end of me."[a]

Brethren, this broken health is a warning that time is passing. Your reason tells you that, sooner or later, in some way or other, the great change which awaits us all must come. It might have come in a moment; in the crash of a railway accident, by a flash of lightning, by a sudden stoppage of the heart's action. It is better that you should know that it is coming; that you should prepare for it on a lower level of health and strength than that to which you have been accustomed. If you now

[a] Isa. xxxviii. 10-12.

hold life by a precarious tenure; if your body is enfeebled, and your limbs are full of pain, and your spirits depressed and sad—all this has come upon you in mercy. Your good health *was* your "refuge," and lo! your refuge has broken down. This world was your home, and now you see that you will have to leave it. It is better, surely, thus; better that, while there is time, you should lift up your heart to Him Who is the One real Home of the soul of man. If your bodily strength decays, there is a strength within your reach which will last for ever; you have only to learn the meaning of the words, "Lord, Thou hast been our Refuge from one generation to another."

Or, ~~since this day last~~ during the last year, some of you have, for the first time, known real sorrow. You had read about it in books, and traced its effect on the countenances of others; but up to the beginning of this year you had never felt a pain of mind which kept you awake at night, and weighed you down throughout the day. Since then God has laid His Hand on you. The home which was then so bright has become a dreary blank. The husband, or the wife, or the child, or the brother, or sister, has been removed. Everything is altered; everything seems touched with a gloom which nothing earthly can remove. Certainly the old habits of life remain, the old dwelling, the familiar faces of neighbours, the old scenes and sounds, the recurring duties, the recurring annoyances and excitements and petty incidents which go to make up life with most of us. But there is now no zest or relish for anything, not even for that which used to please you best. All is draped in gloom; all is touched with bitterness. In every one you meet, in every duty you undertake, in every occurrence which happens to you, in every scene, in every sound, you seem to hear one voice, to

trace one form, to be overcome by one memory. All else is as if it did not exist, you go through with it mechanically; there is coming and going, excitement and repose, a development of new schemes, an abandonment of old habits; life is a kaleidoscope, ever rearranging its forms and hues; but it is all the same to you. You are too sick at heart to care for any part of it; if it forces itself on you, it is, you think, a cruel impertinence, which would break in on the secret suffering of your wounded spirit.

And it may be that to this is added a new and distinct trial. You have led a busy life, and public gossip has made free with your doings, with your motives, with your character. While your home was still peopled by those whom you loved, it mattered little. You shut your front door on the ill-natured world out in the street, and you found around your fireside those who could understand you; you found intelligence, justice, sympathy. But now the vacant chambers of your home echo the voices of the world abroad; they might seem to be in secret understanding with each other. For the old gossip goes on with its varied petty malignity, settling down upon your life, as the flies settle on a weary or sick animal, which, with a presentiment of approaching death, has no longer the heart and vigour to shake them off. In past days you would not have cared; you would have taken refuge in an affection, which reflected the verdict of your honest conscience. But now you are unmanned; you do care, you cannot help it. Every malignant insinuation, every cruel misconstruction, every ingenious caricature, leaves a separate wound; you exclaim with the Psalmist, "Mine enemies are daily at hand to swallow me up."[a] "They came about me like bees;"[b] "In mine adversity they

[a] Ps. lvi. 2. [b] *Ib.* cxviii. 12.

rejoiced, and gathered themselves together: yea, the very abjects came together against me unawares, making mouths at me, and ceased not. With the flatterers were busy mockers, who gnashed upon me with their teeth."[a]

Brethren, this is no new experience. It has been so in all ages; it is an ever-recurring episode in the history of the human heart. You are only experiencing what hundreds of thousands have gone through before you. But what is the purpose of Him Who has thus laid His hand upon you? What is the true meaning of this desolate home, of this wrecked and wounded life, of those ill-natured voices, of this general sense of misery and failure? Believe it, my friend, all this should wean you from this world, and should suggest another. Your true home is not desolate; your true life is not wrecked and wounded; you need not be at the mercy of the world's ill-nature; you need not abandon yourself to a sense of woe and ruin. The Infinite Being Who made you for Himself does not share any of those vicissitudes which belong to all created life; and He would fain comfort you. In rising to Him, in burying your sorrows in His fathomless Love, in forgetting the hard tongues of men, while you listen to the murmured whispers of the Eternal Charity, you, too, may say, "Lord, Thou hast been our Home from one generation to another."

Or, since this day last year, some of those who hear me may be conscious of a great fall from God. Until then, there had been many faults more or less grave, but no deliberate offence; no looking God in the face, and resisting Him. Since one fatal hour all has changed. The light heart, the bright eye, the open countenance, the simple integrity of purpose, are no longer yours.

[a] Ps. xxxv. 15, 16.

You carry about with you a wound which you dare not probe; it is festering in secret; it threatens to infect your whole spiritual being with corruption and death. You cry, "My loins are filled with a sore disease: and there is no whole part in my body. I am feeble and sore smitten: I have roared for the very disquietness of my heart."[a]

And yet there is this cheerful feature in your case, that you do not shut your eyes to it. The worst of all states is to have fallen away from God and not to know it. You, at least, are not under an illusion. You are not now admiring, petting, extolling a false self which your friends have made for you. You see your true self, as it is before God; wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.[b] You have plucked away the tinsel coverings of life; you see the skeleton below. The old illusions of your self-love now seem to you a dreadful irony. Perhaps you are shocked at the falsehood and emptiness of the years which led you up, through a forest of illusions, to your fall. It seems as if all was lost; as if nothing could be saved out of the wreck within; as if love, joy, peace, prayer, had for ever vanished; as if your despair in the presence of the recognized truth must practically lead to the same end as is reached by others through indifference to or forgetfulness of deadly evil.

No, brethren, it is not so. This sore conscience, like a sore body or a sore heart, only more completely and effectually, should lead you back to God. He is the Refuge, not only of the sorrowful and the sick, but also, and pre-eminently, of the repentant sinner. He has left you in no doubt as to how He will meet you, if you turn to Him. He is waiting at the gate of Paradise with the best robe and the fatted calf.[c] His Eternal Son, Incar-

[a] Ps. xxxviii. 7, 8. [b] Rev. iii. 17. [c] St. Luke xv. 22, 23.

nate and Crucified for you, is a pledge of His forgiveness. In the Sacrifice offered on Calvary you have a warrant of pardon. In the Heart of Jesus you may find a Refuge for the aching miseries of the past. "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous; and He is the Propitiation for our sins."[a] You have only to join the great company of penitents which, mingling with the sick and the sorrowful, cries from age to age at the foot of the Cross, "Lord, Thou hast been our Refuge from one generation to another."

Brethren, we have been only looking backward; let us look onward, for one moment, into the future. Where shall we be—you and I—on the last day of the new year? Shall we be in health, or in sickness? Shall we be in bright spirits, or weighed down by sorrow? Shall we be still in the land of the living, or shall we, too, have followed the many who have gone on before us into the kingdom of the dead? How little can we anticipate the answer to these questions! It is as utterly beyond us as are the events of a future removed from us by an interval of a thousand years. What can we do but fall each on his knees ~~this night~~, and cry to the Great Author of our Existence, "Lord, 'my time is in Thy Hand.'[b] Thou canst dispose of me as Thou willest; and I desire, in my weakness, to cast myself upon Thee; to associate myself with that great company of Thy servants to whom Thou hast been and art an Eternal Home; to find in Thy Strength, Thy consolations, Thy Pardon, that which will lift me above the changes of this mortal life; to learn to say with all my heart and soul and strength, Lord, Thou art my Refuge in time and in Eternity"!

[a] 1 St. John ii. 1, 2. [b] Ps. xxxi. 17.

SERMON XVI.

DARK VIEWS OF LIFE.

(SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.)

ECCLES. XI. 4.

He that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.

ON the last Sunday in the year it is not easy to decide at once how to employ our thoughts to the best advantage. For, on the one hand, this Sunday falls within the Christmas week, when Christians would desire to be occupied, so far as may be, with the Love and Mercy of our Divine Saviour, as shown in His taking our nature upon Him that He might redeem us men from sin and death. On the other hand, the last Lord's Day in the year is a natural landmark, which catches the eye of all men who think seriously of the lapse of time. It suggests healthy and solemn thoughts which do not come, at least, so readily on other days, and which have a work to do in us as we pass along the road which leads to another world. How are we to decide between the claims of the Great Festival and the claims of the last hours of the dying year? The best decision is to choose some ground common to both of them, if we can do so; and this, in a measure, I hope to show, is secured by the maxim, "He that regardeth the clouds shall not reap."

The drift of this saying is plain enough if we look at the

context. Solomon is enforcing the duties of charity and hospitality, and he advises his readers to do their best, considering the uncertainty of all human affairs. "Give a portion," he says, "to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth."[a] Evil, he means, either to the giver or the receiver. All is uncertainty; all depends on causes beyond human control, causes which defy human resistance. "If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place that the tree falleth, there it shall be."[b] And yet while it is certain that the clouds and the wind do produce results which affect us very seriously, it is unpractical to give too much thought to that which we cannot influence; the man who does so will never get through his appointed duties in life. "He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap."[c]

By "the clouds," then, in this passage, are meant those sources of misfortune or danger which are out of our reach, which, do what we may, we cannot control. We of the modern world have been taught to admire the clouds for their own sake, as being objects of exceptional beauty; and to trace in them exquisite forms and tints with which nothing else in nature will compare. But this æsthetic enjoyment of the clouds is a thing of modern growth. In the Bible they are generally symbols; symbols of some facts or characteristics of the spiritual or moral or human world. With Job, "the spreadings of the clouds,"[d] and the "balancing of the clouds,"[e] suggest something which is beyond the grasp of the mind of man. With David, the clouds to which the faithfulness and truth[f] of God reach, mark the limits

[a] Eccles. xi. 2. [b] *Ib.* 3. [c] *Ib.* 4.
[d] Job xxxvi. 29. [e] *Ib.* xxxvii. 16. [f] Ps. xxxvi. 5; lvii. 10.

of human experience; the clouds that are "round about"[a] God, denote the veil that screens His Providences from our human sight; the clouds that are God's chariot,[b] are darkness or troubles in the lives or spirits of men, by controlling which God moves forward in the promotion of His Truth and His Kingdom. So again, with the Apostles St. Peter and St. Jude, clouds "carried with a tempest,"[c] are human characters without any stability; "clouds without water,"[d] are human characters that shed no fertilizing influences on those around them. In the text, too, "the clouds" are symbolical of that which excites apprehension in the mind of man. "He that regardeth the clouds," is not, in the language of Solomon, an artist who is entranced with their beauty; more probably he is a farmer, who wants to harvest his crops, and who sees in the clouds sources of possible disaster. But Solomon tells him that nothing is really gained by "regarding the clouds." Do what he will, he cannot disperse them; and if they are threatening, it may be better to make a venture than to wait on in hesitation and disappointment, week after week, before beginning to cut his crops. If he persists in regarding the clouds, the crops must be spoiled. If he reaps at once, the threatened rain may never fall, or he may be beforehand with it.

Here, then, we have, at the hands of this great master of life and conduct, a rule or principle which corresponds with, but is much more important than, the rules of good farming. We are not to spend the brief day of life in wistfully surveying those awful conditions of our existence which do undoubtedly surround it. We are to go forward; we are to do the utmost in and to make the best of that

[a] Ps. xcvii. 2.
[b] *Ib.* civ. 3.
[c] 2 St. Pet. ii. 17.
[d] Jude 12.

circle of duties, that state of life, unto which it has pleased God to call us.

If we suppose a man to be placed in this world without the light of Revelation, how is he likely to look upon his existence? Is life a happiness or a misery, a blessing or a curse? This question will probably be answered in accordance with deep-seated tendencies of individual temperament. But these tendencies, when prolonged and emphasized, become systems of doctrine or philosophies; and so it is that there are two main ways of looking at human life and its surrounding liabilities.

I.

First of all, there is what is called Optimism. It is the product of a temperament which refuses to see in man's earthly existence anything but sunshine. We must all of us have met in private life with persons of this disposition; and, in ordinary circumstances, it must be granted that they are very pleasant people indeed to meet. They act on the advice of the Roman poet; joyfully they snatch the gifts of the passing hour, and they leave the sterner facts of life unnoticed.[a] There are people who never allude to death; it is a disagreeable subject; it casts a shadow over their drawing-rooms and gardens; to refer to it is voted bad taste. If this private Optimism lives at the West End of London, it forgets that the East End exists at all; it spreads a veil over the importunities of poverty and pain; it draws its curtains; it pokes up its fire; it has no patience with people who are always ruffling the harmony of life by forcing on its attention their mournful crotchets; it protests, with a good-natured laugh, that things do not look so gloomy as a morbid piety would make

[a] "Dona præsentis rape lætus horæ
Linque severa."

you think; and it whispers to itself, in familiar words, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry."[a] Perhaps it fancies that it has got hold of the true meaning of Solomon; and that, in not "regarding the clouds, it is obeying him."

This temper or disposition, when brought face to face with the broad facts of human existence, tends to shape itself into a doctrine, a philosophy. Optimism, as a doctrine, assumes that all is with man as it should be; that there is no real want of harmony in his life, or in his relations with God; that all is progressing and developing in the best possible way, if only we will let it alone. Optimism knows nothing of a Redemption, because it knows nothing of a lapse from original righteousness and peace; because it closes its eyes to all from which we have to be redeemed. It travels through this human world like the Quaker who, in the old days, went from London to Plymouth with the blinds of his fly conscientiously drawn down. It shuts its eyes to as much moral and physical evil as it can; but if it cannot help seeing evil all around it, then it attempts to account for evil as a necessary stage or step in the development of good, or as at worst a defect and limitation, rather than something positive and energetic. In short, it ignores both moral disorder and physical decay; it fixes its gaze on the creative and sustaining powers of Nature, and it hymns their excellence as long as they last.

Look at this way of dealing with existence in the hands of a great writer of a kindred race to our own. Goethe's ideal is a healthy, virtuous life, with a sufficient element of self-restraint to preserve contentment with self and with existence;[b] a life with occupation enough to dignify

[a] St. Luke xii. 19.

[b] See Caro, *Philosophie de Goethe*, pp. 190, *sqq.*, and the quotations pp. 416, *sqq.*

the passing moment, and in which a man can forget all that might disturb him in the present or the future. Not that Goethe is without experience of the troubles which are inevitable even in such a life as this. Goethe lives in his writings; he has described what we know to have been his own experiences. In language which will not die, he has pictured the disappointments of the heart, the anguish of the sensitive imagination, the illusions which await the ambitious efforts of the understanding; the unattainableness of boundless knowledge or of boundless enjoyment here below. And he might seem in all this to be preparing the way of the Lord; but, like the old pagan Greeks, he has no aims beyond this lower world. His object is to get what happiness out of it he can, and then to bend with dignity to the inevitable. If he does not regard the great clouds, the solemnities of pain and death, which hang in solemn warning around human existence, it is not in Solomon's spirit that he is acting, but in the spirit of the young man who rejoices in his youth,[a] and whom Solomon condemns.

The objection to this optimistic theory is that it is inconsistent with facts; it only suits a man who has good health, fair abilities, and sufficient means. Such a man may, for a certain time, keep the sterner realities of life at bay, and dream that this is the best of possible worlds in which he lives. But for the immense majority of human beings the language of Optimism can never sound other than a heartless irony. It is not well to play the fiddle while Rome is burning, or to dance upon the deck of a sinking craft. Even the buoyant spirit of the Greeks gave way before great calamities. Even the sunny Optimism of Goethe, which makes no account of the multitudes who have neither money, nor health, nor talent,

[a] Eccles. xi. 9.

but who, nevertheless, are here, and need a theory of existence, was not always proof against the force of the obvious. Once, at least, this temper of refined and cultivated selfishness was awed into another mood by the sights and sounds of a great city, with its heavy burden of poverty and pain; and it learnt that there are things in earth, if not in Heaven, which had not been duly allowed for by its smiling philosophy.

II.

And here an opposite estimate of human existence claims a hearing; and it, too, is first of all a temper or disposition, and then a theory or doctrine. We have all of us met with people who make a point of looking at everything on its darkest side; who fondle and cherish grievances; who, as if under some stern pressure of conscience, do not allow themselves to recognize the happier features of the circumstances in which Almighty God has placed them. For them the sun never shines, the flowers never open, the face of man never smiles. They see everything through a dense atmosphere of depression and gloom, and they mistake their own sombre impressions for hard realities. The man in the parable, with one talent, who knew that his lord was an austere man, reaping where he had not sown, and gathering where he had not strawed, and who went and hid his talent in the earth, was a genuine pessimist.[a]

The pessimist has no eye for the creative and recuperative forces of nature; he lingers over its tendencies to corruption and decay. He sees before him only death in life, never life in death. For him man's history is made up of recurring cycles of unprofitable experience;

[a] St. Matt. xxv. 24.

civilization emerging from and sinking back into barbarism, without any lasting gains for human progress and improvement. For him human life is a constant victory of evil over good, or a succession of efforts which are at best hopeless, aimless, abortive.

Pessimism, too, has had a great exponent; Schopenhauer was a countryman of Goethe's. But we need not go abroad to find its prophets. It is the creed of a poet of our own; the poet of fruitless earthly suffering, of profound melancholy, of fierce defiance of destiny, of all the accumulated and tragic bitternesses of the human heart. Byron, like Goethe, lives in his creations; he is his own Cain, who, after passing through boundless space, descends with Lucifer into the kingdom of death, and fills his heart with soreness against God.

> "Why do I exist?
> Why art *thou* wretched? why are all things so?
> E'en He Who made us must be, as the Maker
> Of things unhappy! To produce destruction
> Can surely never be the task of joy.[a]

And Byron is Manfred, too—Manfred who hears the curse—

> "There are shades which will not vanish,
> There are thoughts thou canst not banish;
> By a power to thee unknown,
> Thou canst never be alone;
> Thou art wrapped as with a shroud,
> Thou art gathered in a cloud;
> And for ever shalt thou dwell
> In the spirit of this spell.[b]

Byron is Manfred himself, who exclaims—

> "We are the fools of time and terror;
> Days steal on us and steal from us; yet we live,
> Loathing our life, and dreading still to die.
> In all the days of this detested yoke—

[a] *Cain*, Act II. Sc. 2. [b] *Manfred*, Act I. Sc. 1.

This vital weight upon the struggling heart,
Which sinks with sorrow, or beats quick with pain,
Or joy that ends in agony or faintness—
In all the days of past and future, for
In life there is no present, we can number
How few—how less than few—wherein the soul
Forbears to pant for death, and yet draws back
As from a stream in winter, though the chill
Be but a moment." [a]

Such is full-blown Pessimism; it lives in this wail of anguish issuing from the depths of a human heart. And yet it must be granted that, when Christianity is rejected or unknown, Pessimism has a larger basis of fact than Optimism. The clouds, after all, are there; and they do not disappear because we forget them. Even to look at them until we forget that the sun, after all, shines on their higher side, is, perhaps, a less serious mistake than to ignore them altogether.

III.

One of the incidental proofs of the Divine greatness of Christianity is to be found in its attitude towards these opposing estimates of human life. Christianity is by turns pessimist and optimist. Christianity does not quarrel with the principle of either way of looking at life, but only with its misapplication. Christ our Lord cannot allow that human nature, weakened, impoverished, degraded by the Fall, exposed to the inroads of temptation and sin, subject to the laws of sickness and death, destined to an Eternity which will correspond substantially with the moral qualities of the earthly life, is a fitting subject for light-hearted self-congratulations. Nor, on the other hand, is it consistent with faith in, and respect for, His finished work, to despair of souls or of societies which

[a] *Manfred*, Act II. Sc. 2.

He has redeemed, in forgetfulness of the new forces with which He has endowed them. St. Paul is pessimist enough in his description of the condition and prospects of the heathen world at the beginning of his Epistle to the Romans.[a] But who more optimist than he, who more buoyantly confident of the splendid destinies reserved for the servants of Christ, than this same Apostle, when in this same Epistle he describes the effects of the Law of the Spirit of Life,[b] or, in his Epistles to the Colossians and Ephesians, our incorporation with the Human Nature of the Redeemer? With human nature left to itself he can hope for nothing; with human nature redeemed and invigorated by Jesus Christ he can despair of nothing. Of the one he says, "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing."[c] Of the other he cries, "I can do all things through Christ That strengtheneth me."[d]

And thus we see how the Birth of our Saviour into this human world was the consecration of Optimism and the condemnation of Pessimism. Pessimism, which is common sense in a heathen, is, in a Christian, disloyalty to Christ. Optimism, which in a heathen is sheer folly, is in a Christian, who knows what has been done for him, mere common sense. The reason is, because a new and Divine Power has, at the Birth of Christ, entered into human nature; has reversed its old downward inclination; has corrected the warp towards evil which fatally distorted it; has endowed it with a vigour which comes from Heaven. "The Day-star from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace."[e]

[a] Rom. i. 18–32. [b] *Ib.* viii. 1–39. [c] *Ib.* vii. 18.
[d] Phil. iv. 13. [e] St. Luke i. 78, 79.

IV.

And hence, in the words of the text we have a maxim, applying, no doubt, in its measure to other believers in a Providence, but applying especially to Christians. The Christian who "regardeth the clouds," who looks long and wistfully at evils, or threatenings of evil, which are beyond his power to remove or correct, shall not reap the harvest of work or joy which lies ready to his hand. For so to "regard the clouds" takes time and thought, and even effort; and our stock of these things is too small to admit of any wasteful expenditure. And so to "regard the clouds" depresses the spirits and enfeebles the arm, when strength of purpose and resolute exertion are needed for the work of God. There are evils enough nearer the earth than the clouds; evils of our own causing, or springing from our own neglect; evils lying across our path, or at the side of it; and on these we cannot bestow too much attention. But "the clouds," however much we may gaze at them, and wish them rearranged or dispersed, are, after all, out of our reach.

Surely just now there are dark clouds in the sky of our national life. Who does not see them? A scanty harvest; stagnation in trade and manufactures; lack of buoyancy in the revenue; disturbed relations between capital and labour; hard times, in short, as compared with the close of 1876,—these are clouds visible to every observant eye. And there are other clouds, of which I need hardly speak—clouds of war and of alarms of war. The political atmosphere is charged with them; we seem already to catch the flash of the lightning on the horizon; we listen for the distant peal of the thunder. One cloud there is, which has of late seemed to hang

threateningly over our country; the risk lest, through an exaggerated anxiety respecting contingencies remotely affecting one portion of the empire, we should be hurried into an expenditure of blood and treasure in behalf of an ancient system of misgovernment and wrong which might already seem to be passing away before our eyes. May He Who "disposes and turns the hearts of kings as it seemeth best to His Godly Wisdom," [a] so dispose and govern the hearts of our rulers that we may escape responsibility for such a war as this, and that this cloud which has added to the depression of our short December days may quickly and utterly roll away! [b]

It would be untrue to say that, in a free and, practically speaking, self-governing country, all the evils which I have mentioned are beyond the reach of individual action. Doubtless some among us can do much to prevent them; and all of us may do something—each in his place and station—by the conscientious formation and utterance of opinion, and resolute discharge of personal duty. But, for the most part, these great issues are beyond us; and if, in stirring and anxious times, we cannot help thinking of them, we had better not think of them too much, or we shall neglect the duties, as well as the evils, of our daily life. The best service of the State is rendered by the man who makes duty, honesty, disinterestedness, his guiding principles, even though it be not his business to "regard the clouds."

And there are clouds in the religious sky, too. Who does not see them? The entirely new position which has been assumed by unbelief within the last twenty

[a] Prayer for the Queen, Communion Service.

[b] The reference is to the apprehension of a war with Russia at the close of 1877.

years; the unrebuked denial of revealed truths even by teachers of religion; the deep divisions between Christians, in face of the advancing foe; the war of brother with brother, and that before those who do not share our faith;[a] and then, as a natural result of this, the tendency of some minds, anxious to find at any price a refuge from the blasts of controversy, to accept imposing claims and tenets which were unknown to the Christianity of the first ages, but which render a religious system, if not true, at least highly organized and strong,—these are clouds which darken the sky of faith. And it is difficult for those who feel deeply about these things to keep their eyes off such clouds, and to set about their humble daily round of Christian duties. Certainly we can do something, nay, much, in respect of these anxieties; we may make them subjects of prayer. It is better to complain to God[b] than to man; better in itself, and more remunerative. But having done this, it is of no real use to look continually at the clouds. If God had placed us like the Prophets of old on their watch-towers,[c] or like a Christian Bishop on the spiritual observatory of his Diocese, it would be a duty, no doubt, to give not less attention to the clouds than to the stars and to the sun. As it is, whatever is close to us, around us, before us, within us, has a first claim on our thought and effort.

Clouds, too, there may be in the sky of the family, or in the sky of the soul. Loss of means, loss of friends, the failure of well-meant designs, the misconduct of children, —these things weigh on us. We try to get rid of them, but we find ourselves reverting to them when alone, by day and by night; we "regard the clouds." And, in the soul's life, the unaccountable decay or loss of spiritual

[a] 1 Cor. vi. 6. [b] Ps. xviii. 5. [c] Isa. xxi. 6–8; lxii. 6.

insight, the paralysis, during considerable periods of life, of the power of prayer, the dark thoughts which impair the will and chill the affections, the strange and mysterious influences which contact with the bodily frame does undoubtedly exert over the spirit,—these are inward troubles which cause deep and painful apprehension. Of these trials some may be conquered by resolute service, all may be alleviated by prayer. But, alike in the family and in the soul, there are clouds which we cannot banish. Let us not "regard" them; let us leave them to God.

Yes! as we stand on the threshold of another year; as we cast a thought backwards at those who were among us twelve months ago, our friends, our relatives, our teachers, our rulers, and who have now passed into the unseen world; as we strain our eyes to look forward, if possible, into the depths of the awful future, and trace, if it may be, any intimation of what is in store for us; we must feel that we may not waste much thought, passion, energy, on evils which we cannot hope to modify or remove. Life is too short, its real business too urgent, its issues too momentous. And, above all, God, Who maketh the very clouds which disquiet us the chariots [a] of His Providences through the courses of time, is always near us; He is with us. God, the Everlasting and the Infinite, the All-Powerful, the All-Wise, the All-Good; God the Father Who created, the Son Who has redeemed, the Spirit Who sanctifies us; God Who is the Source and the true End of our several existences, and Who teaches us at Bethlehem, as on Calvary, the boundlessness of His Love; God bids us remember that He is Lord not only of the sunshine, but of the clouds, and that to trust Him perfectly, instead of regarding them too anxiously, is to prepare to reap the Eternal Harvest.

[a] Ps. civ. 3.

SERMON XVII.

LIGHT FROM HEAVEN.

(SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.)

Ps. xxvii. 1.

The Lord is my Light.

DAVID is in exile; he is engaged in some fierce struggle on the frontiers of the Holy Land. His foes have received a check. "When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me, they stumbled and fell."[a] But another and more desperate conflict is evidently at hand, when "an host of men will encamp against him."[b] He is closely watched, but he is already confident of victory; he will yet end his life near the Tabernacle, and will offer sacrifices of thanksgiving. All seems to point to the later stage of Absalom's rebellion, when the final battle was imminent, and David had recovered in part from the deep despondency of the preceding period. "I should utterly have fainted, but that I believe verily to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."[c] "One thing have I desired of the Lord, which I will require, even that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the fair beauty of the Lord, and to visit His Temple."[d] For "the Lord is my Light and my Salva-

[a] Ps. xxvii. 2. [b] *Ib.* 3. [c] *Ib.* 13. [d] *Ib.* 4.

tion; whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the Strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?"

"The Lord is my Light." Here only does David so speak of God; and, indeed, the exact expression occurs only twice in the Old Testament. "When I sit in darkness," says the Prophet Micah, "the Lord shall be a Light unto me."[a] Elsewhere light is spoken of as given by God to His servants. "In Thy light we shall see light;"[b] "There is sprung up a light for the righteous;"[c] "God is the Lord Which hath showed us light;"[d] "Thy Word is a lantern unto my feet, and a light unto my paths."[e]

And David means by "light," that blessing in the life of the spirit which answers to the light of day that we see with our bodily eyes; that entirely immaterial but most real assistance by which, in respect of itself, and other creatures, and the Being of beings, the soul sees things, not in a mist and confusedly, but as they are; that endowment from on high which discovers the path it has to follow, and the difficulties which await, and the encouragements that should sustain it, so clearly and directly, that it cannot mistake. And this light, as David experienced it, was twofold. It was from without and from within, but in both cases from God. It shone on David's soul from the outward Revelation of Sinai, which was to him, as to the Psalmist of the Captivity, a lantern unto his feet.[f] It shone within him from the natural moral sense enthroned in his conscience, which was in harmony with the light that streamed on him from the outward Revelation. But this is the peculiarity of David's expression, that he sees in or behind this light, whether of the Law or of the conscience, a Higher Presence from which it really streamed. "The Lord," he says, as

[a] Micah vii. 8. [b] Ps. xxxvi. 9. [c] *Ib.* xcvii. 11.
[d] *Ib.* cxviii. 27. [e] *Ib.* cxix. 105. [f] *Ib.*

distinct from any human teacher or code, or any mere product of his own higher consciousness,—"The Lord is my Light."

"The Lord is my Light." David's was a life of great vicissitudes. It was passed by turns in the sheepfolds, in the wilderness, at the court, in the camp, in the palace; it was in succession a life of persecution, of exile, of victory, of assured repose. David's temperament, too, was of a kind which alternates between periods of great exhilaration and great depression: like all men who enjoy high and buoyant spirits, he paid for the enjoyment by corresponding periods of excessive gloom. So it had been when, like a hunted animal, he fled from the court of Saul, to be dependent on the good will of a pagan prince,[a] or to escape from cave to forest, from one stronghold to another, as a mere outlaw who had nothing to hope and everything to fear from his implacable enemy. So it was again now, when his rebel son had stolen from him the hearts of his people, and was at the head of an insurrection which seemed likely to be successful. Without, all was dark; no human counsel or prudence could shed any light on David's soul. But David knows of a secret Presence Which is not dependent on outward circumstance. "The Lord is my Light and my Salvation; whom then should I fear?" David's darkest days were caused, not by outward troubles, but by personal sin. His misdeeds are gross and patent. His sin consists, not in pervading and subtle faults of character, but in flagrant breaches of that law of right and wrong which God has traced on the tablets of every human heart, and which had been proclaimed in the plainest language by the Jewish Revelation. David was an adulterer and a murderer, not to mention other sins which the sacred narrative is not careful to veil.

[a] 1 Sam. xxviii. 1-7.

And yet this seducer of Bathsheba, this murderer of Uriah, is said to be "the man after God's own heart."[a] How can this be—scornful unbelief and puzzled faith have often asked that question—how can this be, consistently with the moral perfections of Him Who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity?[b]

The answer is that a human life is to be appraised less by its prominent but exceptional details than by its governing principle. Details, that is, acts and words, whether good or bad, are of great moment. "By their fruits ye shall know them,"[c] "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."[d] These maxims would alone prevent our saying anything so shallow and irreverent as that our acts do not matter. No act, whether good or evil, leaves us as it found us; it raises or it degrades; it leaves an imprint—of that let us be sure—which is all its own. David was damaged, deeply and permanently, by the sins which form so prominent a feature in his life; but these sins did not destroy in him that sense of God's Presence and claims which was at the root of his character.

Conspicuous acts in a man's life may look one way and its governing principle another. The second great Polyglot Bible that ever was published—that at the Antwerp Press, in the sixteenth century—was encouraged and paid for by Philip II. of Spain; but the main current of Philip's life, thought, and conduct is not of the character which the Antwerp Polyglot would suggest. King Saul's real and permanent state of mind—his moral levity, his fundamental indifference to the claims of God—is accurately expressed by his conduct after the Amalekite victory, by his off-handed presumption in offering sacri-

[a] Acts xiii. 22.
[b] Hab. i. 13.
[c] St. Matt. vii. 20.
[d] *Ib.* xii. 37.

fices,[a] and by his transactions with the witch of Endor.[b] But David's real and permanent state of mind is not expressed by his gross and deadly sins. Those sins were the result of a temporary ascendancy of uncontrolled passion. But they did not last enough to fasten themselves with the force of habit upon his will, or to extinguish altogether the inward light which burned in his conscience. In his moments of deepest and most self-humbling repentance he still cries, "Cast me not away from Thy Presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me."[c] Still, in a certain sense, the Lord was his light; the light by which he saw things as they really were, when the mists of passion and self-love would fain have hidden them. "I acknowledge my faults: and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight: that Thou mightest be justified in Thy saying, and clear when Thou art judged." "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, of Thy great goodness: according to the multitude of Thy mercies do away mine offences."[d]

I.

"The Lord is my Light." Such words have a peculiar force at this sacred season. For the idea which is hinted at in David's language is expressly revealed in the New Testament. God does not merely give us light; He is Light, just as He is Love, in His own Uncreated Nature. "God is Light," says St. John, "and in Him is no darkness at all."[e] When St. John would state our Lord's absolute Godhead as sharply as possible, He calls Him "the Light;" meaning to teach that as such He shares the Essential Nature of Deity. Observe how St. John is

[a] 1 Sam. xv. 7–23. [b] *Ib.* xxviii. 7–20. [c] Ps. li. 11.
[d] *Ib.* 3, 4, 1. [e] 1 St. John i. 5.

careful to distinguish between the Baptist, "who was a burning and shining light," in "whose light men were willing for a season to rejoice,"[a] and "That Light." The Baptist was "not That Light, but was sent to bear witness of That Light; That was the true Light, Which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."[b] The disciples also are, in one sense, "the light of the world,"[c] because, by His teaching and His grace, He had them raised to this eminence. But in Him light was not a gift; it was inseparable from His very existence. "In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men."[d] He is Light, because He is what He is; absolute perfection in respect alike of intellectual truth and of moral beauty. Hence these momentous words, "I am the Light of the world."[e] Hence the Creed, "God of God, Light of Light."[f]

Thus the Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ was to the spiritual world what the rising of the sun is in the world of nature. Even upon the orders of heavenly intelligences it had effects, at which St. Paul hints in his Epistle to the Ephesians.[g] But for the human soul it meant a passage from darkness to light, and from cold to sunshine. Prophecy had bidden Zion arise and shine, since her Light had come, and the glory of the Lord had risen upon her.[h] The Sun of Righteousness was announced, Who should arise with healing in His wings.[i] Although darkness had covered the earth, and gross darkness the people, yet the Lord should arise upon Zion, and His glory be seen upon her.[j] Accordingly Zacharias salutes Him as "the Day-star from on high Who hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death;"[k]

[a] St. John v. 35. [b] *Ib.* i. 8, 9. [c] St. Matt. v. 14.
[d] St. John i. 4. [e] *Ib.* viii. 12. [f] Nicene Creed.
[g] Eph. iii. 9–11. [h] Isa. lx. 1. [i] Mal. iv. 2.
[j] Isa. lx. 2. [k] St. Luke i. 78, 79.

and Simeon, holding the Divine Saviour in his arms, proclaims that He is "a Light to lighten the Gentiles."[a] It was felt that the word of prophecy was fulfilled, when "the people which walked in darkness had seen a great Light, and they that walk in the region and shadow of death, upon them had the Light shined."[b] When Jesus, the Sun of the moral world, rose above the horizon of time, first one and then another height was touched by His rays; and gradually the light crept down the hillsides, and reached the valleys of human life, so that no scene was too remote to be bathed in its warmth and splendour. Some of us will remember that great work of Christian genius, the picture of the Nativity—the *Notte*, as it is called—by Correggio, which is among the treasures of the Dresden Gallery. In it the Divine Infant is represented as with a body almost transparent with light, and from Him the light streams on all around; His Mother, His foster-father, the angels, are illuminated in the proportion of their nearness to Him. This is but a representation on canvas of a spiritual and eternal truth. He is the One Light of the world, and we are in the light just so far, and only so far, as we are near Him.

II.

"The Lord is my Light." If the Christian Church had to choose a motto from the Sacred Scriptures, it would be difficult to find one which would seem to be more appropriate than this. For, like David, the Church has had, and may yet have, her days of darkness.

Such were, in one sense, those early days when she was oppressed by the powers of this world. So it was for nearly three hundred years after the Day of Pentecost.

[a] St. Luke ii. 32. [b] Isa. ix. 2; St. Matt. iv. 15, 16.

With short periods of reprieve, she underwent continuous persecution from Nero to Constantine. In those days of recorded and unrecorded sufferings, even stout Christian hearts gave way, despairing of the fortunes of the Kingdom of God, and purchasing immunity from danger by the shame of apostasy. The "lapsed," as they were called, were, at certain places and times—as in Africa in the middle of the third century—quite a numerous class, for whose case the Church had to legislate specially.[a] But when to be a professed Christian meant fines, imprisonment, torture, death, what was the support of the thousands who persevered? What was it that sustained young men and maidens, and aged men, and little boys, the records of whose trials before their pagan judges still exist? It was the knowledge that Christ, the Light of the world, was close to them, flooding their minds and hearts and imaginations with His light. And, as David says, "in His light they saw light;"[b] the light which ever illuminates, for honest and true hearts, the path of duty and the path of sacrifice. "They had an eye unto Him, and were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed."[c] Of this truth there was a kind of physical expression in the case of St. Stephen, when they that sat in the council looked on his face as it had been the face of an angel.[d] If you read the genuine Acts of the Martyrs, you will see that Stephen is only the first of a great company. Indeed, from that day to this there have always been Christians who, in times of rebuke and suffering, have looked to "Jesus, the Author and Finisher of their faith, Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross,"[e] and at that sight have had the grace to say sincerely, "The Lord is my Light."

[a] St. Cypr., Epp. 55, 56, 57, 65, 67.
[b] Ps. xxxvi. 9.
[c] *Ib.* xxxiv. 5.
[d] Acts vi. 15.
[e] Heb. xii. 2.

But the Church, like David, has had days of darkness of another description. Days of internal corruption, of moral decay, of serious departure, at certain times and places, from the life and teaching of the Apostles of Christ. Such were the days of Athanasius, when the Christian world awoke and wondered to find itself largely Arian. Such was the tenth century, when the Papacy was openly controlled for many years by persons of bad character. Such was the period of the Renaissance, when gross corruptions, such as the system of Indulgences, the traffic in Masses, the nepotism and selfishness of high ecclesiastics on the one side, were met on the other by a revival of pure paganism; of pagan art, of pagan poetry, and too often in the literary classes of pagan morals. Such was the last century in our own Church and country, when Churchmen were often sluggish and useless on what claimed to be a sort of principle; when enthusiasm was deemed the only evil to be avoided, whether the enthusiasm of Rome or the enthusiasm of Methodism; when the dead torpor of cold respectability, which seemed to care for nothing save the outer shell of an Ecclesiastical Establishment, had settled down upon the Church in which Andrewes and Ken had lived and prayed, and for which Laud had shed his blood. But, even in those dreary days, there were men like Bishop Wilson of Sodor and Man, whose blessing men asked on their knees in the streets of London; and Butler, not more distinguished for his massive thought than for his genuine piety; and others, such as Nelson and Law, ministers and laymen, who could say with David, "The Lord is my Light." In the darkest times of the Church the darkness has not been universal; the sap has not all been dried up; the tradition of light and warmth has been handed on to happier days, when multitudes could again say with thankful sincerity, "The Lord is my Light."

"The Lord is my Light." Here, too, is a rule for Christian education. In days when our forefathers really believed that the knowledge of God was the most precious kind of knowledge, our oldest University took these words for its device: "Dominus illuminatio mea"—"The Lord is my Light." The device remains; heraldry does no harm to anybody. But the spirit which chose and meant it has largely, if not for the most part, vanished. Indeed, education, all along the line, is becoming, we may well fear, less and less religious. Religion is driven from its old place of honour in many of our primary schools; it must be taught, if at all, at out-of-the-way hours; as though it were a sort of fanciful subject which the eccentric or the old-fashioned still cared about. Knowledge which has nothing directly to do with God is called emphatically useful knowledge; as though to know the Author and Ruler and Judge of our life were comparatively useless. Our old grammar schools are passing more and more out of the hands of the ministers of Christ into those of laymen who may be Churchmen and Christians, but who also may not; and the wonders of nature, and the physiology and history of man, are studied by thousands of cultivated minds without a thought of Him Whose glory and resources these works of His Hands declare.[a] Some good people think it a mistake to call attention to these serious characteristics of our generation; it is enough for them that the spirit of the time is against the old religious conception of what education should be, and for various reasons, some more and some less respectable, they do not wish to be behindhand. But if God has really told us what He is, what He wills us to be, what is our destiny after death, and what our means of preparing for it, then this knowledge, from the nature of

[a] Ps. xix. 1.

the case, is and must be unspeakably more important than all the history, and philosophy, and grammar, and mathematics, and natural science in the world. And if this, the most important kind of knowledge, is being more and more thrown into the background and neglected; it is more than foolish to go on talking the language of a self-complacent optimism, and making things comfortable all round, or, as the Prophet Ezekiel would have said, "sewing pillows to all armholes."[a] For, besides being at issue with fact, this optimism has a direct tendency to prevent improvement, by leading people to think that no improvement is necessary, and that the honour of God and the needs of the human soul are sufficiently provided for in average modern education. Assuredly the day may come, and at no very distant time, when we shall discover our mistake. To sharpen the mental faculties, and store the memory and the understanding with knowledge which refers only to the things of time, without unveiling to the soul of a child Him Whose awful and beautiful light alone can invigorate and guide conduct, and control passion, and open and purify affection;—this is merely to arm the human brute with weapons which may be used with terrible effect against all the best interests of humanity itself. One kind of education only —depend upon it—is safe; one only deserves the name; and its governing principle as well as its motto is ever, from age to age, "The Lord is my Light."

"The Lord is my Light." This is the motto, too, for the individual Christian. In precisely the degree in which we can truthfully say these words are we loyal to our Lord Jesus Christ. If in our hearts we believe that He is the Truth, as well as the Way and the Life;[b] that in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and know-

[a] Ezek. xiii. 18. [b] St. John xiv. 6.

ledge;[a] that since no man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten God (such is apparently the true reading) Which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him;[b] that thus He is made unto us wisdom, as well as righteousness and sanctification and redemption;[c]—how can we hesitate to refer to Him all that touches the formation of opinion, or the course of conduct during our present life? It may occur to us that a hundred questions present themselves to our thoughts for consideration or solution on which there is no information, to which there is no direct reference in the Gospels or in the Creeds. No doubt this is the case; but does it, therefore, follow that our Lord casts no ray of light upon these questions? The Gospel supplies us with principles of thought and principles of conduct, and we have to trace the application of these principles for ourselves to the subjects and questions which come before us. There is no real difficulty in doing this if a man be quite serious in wishing to do it. It is easy to see whether a particular view of past history or of contemporary events does or does not recognize or leave room for belief in God's overruling Providence; whether a given account of the origin of man is reconcilable with the truth that, whatever be the physiological history of his body, he has a free will and an immortal soul, and has been redeemed and will be judged by our Lord Jesus Christ; whether this or that view of the extent and character of the religious element in heathendom harmonizes with the fact that God has really revealed Himself, first to Israel, at sundry times and in divers manners, and then more fully by His Son our Lord Jesus Christ; whether such and such an account of the relation of man's will to the pressure of surrounding circumstances is compatible with our being

[a] Col. ii. 8. [b] St. John i. 18. [c] 1 Cor. i. 30.

accountable agents, redeemed by our Lord Jesus Christ and enlightened by His Holy Spirit.

In the same way, it is easy to find out whether a given course of conduct is right or not, by asking ourselves, What would our Lord Jesus Christ have done, or have advised us to do, in the days of His flesh? The answer to this simple inquiry will at once satisfy us as to two-thirds of the questions which we treat as open, or as perplexing. We know how He would have dealt with what we sometimes think a proper pride,[a] or due care of our own interests,[b] or "marrying" (so to describe the process) a divorced person,[c] or making everything give way to amassing a fortune.[d] And as to the remaining third of unsettled questions, we can generally find our way, by thinking out their points of analogy with questions which He has settled; by applying, with needful adjustments and allowances, the principles which He has laid down; or by weighing probabilities, such as may be inferred from an anxious and accurate survey of what is in itself beyond discussion.

And if, when this has been done, there still remain districts of conduct where the right course is indistinct, and where for the time we stumble in darkness and see not the light, and note how even good men take divergent paths or opposite sides, we can at least ask our Lord, Who has promised to guide us, to show us the way that we should walk in, since we lift up our souls to Him.

"Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on;
The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on.
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me."[e]

[a] St. Matt. v. 3, 5, 38–40; xxiii. 12. [b] *Ib.* xvi. 24–26.
[c] *Ib.* v. 32. [d] *Ib.* vi. 19, 20; St. Mark x. 23–25; St. Luke xii. 15–21.
[e] J. H. Newman, *Lyra Apostolica*, No. xxv.

We stand this afternoon within a few hours of the close of another year; and we are each of us one year nearer to death and judgment, to Heaven or to hell, than we were on the 31st of December, 1881. A truism, some one will say. Yes, but also, an awful truth. How much has passed since this day last year! Some great national mercies at once occur to us as subjects for thankfulness to the Giver of all good. A war[a] has been brought to a speedy conclusion. And if to a serious Christian war can at the best appear nothing better than a dreadful and humiliating necessity, we may reflect with thankfulness that its early and successful termination has involved less human suffering than would have resulted from a prolonged campaign. Something, too, we may hope, has been done to arrest the systematic perpetration of murder in the sister island; and there is no question between us and any foreign power which threatens a rupture of European peace. But how many familiar figures—statesmen, popular writers, soldiers, jurists, divines—have passed into the unseen world since this time last year! One especially occurs to us here, since he was among the clergy of this Church. His gentle and kindly nature, and amid weakness and failing health, unwearied devotion to duty, and perfect consideration for others, and simple and unaffected piety, will long endear him to us who have had the happiness of serving our Lord in his company, on the foundation of this Cathedral.[b] And others there are whose death has caused more general concern. Three may be mentioned. The death of an Archbishop of Canterbury can never be an unimportant event to members of the Church of England; and the late

[a] The Egyptian campaign against Arabi, September, 1882.

[b] The Rev. J. V. Povah, M.A., Rector of St. Anne and St. Agnes, Aldersgate, and Minor Canon of St. Paul's, died February 28, 1882.

Primate[a] was a man whose character and ability would have made him remarkable in any position. Not less noteworthy is the death of the noble and single-hearted Missionary Bishop, whose ambition it was to win Central Africa for Christ.[b] And one other has passed from among us, who of late years was rarely seen, but whose name and influence were, and are, and will yet be, a moral power of the first importance; a man who could stir the hearts of men in their most serious moments as, in these later days of Christendom, few men have ever stirred them; a man in whom immense learning, and fearless devotion to truth and duty, and inexhaustible tenderness, and all those finer aspects of character which constitute saintliness, went hand in hand; a member of that company of elect souls whom God permits to appear on earth at intervals that they may do some special work in His kingdom, while their withdrawal into His nearer Presence is felt at the time, and is looked back to in after ages, as an event of great moment to the spiritual life of mankind.[c] And in how many is there now a vacant place which was filled one short year ago, and which reminds us who survive that the time is short; and that it remains that "they that have wives, be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away"![d]

We stand for these few hours at a division of time;

[a] Archibald Campbell Tait, Archbishop of Canterbury, died December 3, 1882.

[b] The Right Rev. Edward Steere, D.D., Missionary Bishop of Central Africa, died August 27, 1882.

[c] The Rev. E. B. Pusey, D.D., died at Ascot, Berks, September 16, 1882.

[d] 1 Cor. vii. 29-31.

we look backward and we look onwards. How many of us will still be here on the last day of next year? What may or may not await us between this day and that; what successes, what failures, what disappointments, what surprises! Perhaps some accession of happiness of which we form no idea! Perhaps the forfeiture of all that we most love in this world! Perhaps the last scene of all; and the opening of that new existence, upon which so many have lately entered whom we have known and loved! Brethren, only one thing will enable us to look forward to this uncertain future with entire tranquillity; the Light of Jesus Christ our Lord in our souls; the power to say with humble confidence, "The Lord is my Light and my Salvation; whom then shall I fear? the Lord is the Strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?"

SERMON XVIII.

PROVIDENCE AND LIFE.

(SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.)

PS. XXXI. 17.

My time is in Thy Hand.

THE Prayer-book Version of the Psalms does not always keep so close to the letter of the Hebrew as does the Authorized Version. But it is not often less true to the general drift and spirit of the writers. And, being in itself, as a piece of English, much more beautiful than the Authorized Version, it enables us the better to conceive of the beauty of the original. The truth is, the Prayer-book Version was made at a time when the English language had reached the zenith of its perfection; the men of the sixteenth century had a more perfect ear for the harmonies and the resources of our mother-tongue than the men of the seventeenth. How far we of the nineteenth have fallen below the standard of the seventeenth may be gathered from the recent attempt to produce a Revised Version; but in the seventeenth century the decline had already begun. Various fancies and conceits, some of foreign origin, had made men less content with that earlier speech, so strong, so simple, so clear, so tender, which was in the mouths of our forefathers

under the Tudor kings. Certainly, the Prayer-book Psalter is better known to Church-people than the Bible Version; and, with a very little care to ascertain and mark the passages in which it fails to do justice to the original, it may still be enjoyed as they can best enjoy it who know that the purest language is the fittest robe for the most perfect thought.

These remarks are partly suggested by the text before us. The original is more exactly rendered by the Authorized Version, "My times are in Thy Hand;" the meaning being that all the seasons of human life, with their successive phases of weal and woe, are in the keeping, or Hand, of God. But this meaning is included in the less exact but more English expression, "My time." Life as a whole, including all its subdivisions, is in the keeping of God; its joys and its sorrows, its successes and its failures, its beginning and its close. Especially the close of life, and not of some one of its subdivisions, is prominent in David's thought; and thus, although the Prayer-book Version is less true to the letter than the Bible Version, it renders the mind of the Psalmist with at least equal fulness.

I.

David's reflection was one of those which men are led naturally to make in times of anxiety such as the successful rebellion of Absalom had brought upon him. In days of health and strength, when everything prospers, and there is as yet no cloud on the horizon, it is less easy thus to take the true measure of life. The foreground of the picture is too satisfactory and too engrossing to permit of a more distant and penetrating survey. Consider the picture which a late Psalmist gives of a prosperous class of men in his day—

"They are in no peril of death,
But are lusty and strong;
They come in no misfortune like other folk,
Neither are they plagued like other men;
And this is the cause that they are so holden with pride,
And overwhelmed with cruelty." [a]

In days of health and strength, it is difficult to think of illness as a reality with which we shall hereafter have to make acquaintance. We are so conscious of exuberant energy, so taken up with making the most we can of it, so little apprehensive of its one day failing us as it never failed before, that we are not disposed to heed any symptoms which foretell decay and dissolution. And in like manner, when all goes well with us, and our plans prosper, and the world smiles its congratulations, we cannot bring ourselves to think that a turn in public affairs, or a failure in business, may make for us all the difference between prosperity and adversity. David had had early in life the advantage of a long training in the school of trouble. His position at the court of Saul, and the years which followed on his leaving it, brought him much perplexity and danger; and when his rebel son took up arms against him, and endeavoured to drive him from his throne, he was less surprised and shocked than most men would have been. "My time," he cried, "is in Thy Hand, O Lord; deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me."

We may conjecture that the Psalm belongs to the early days of the rebellion, when David's cause appeared to be in serious jeopardy. He had to leave Jerusalem, and to fly with a small band of followers across the Jordan. Powerful monarch as he had been, he could not but know that, on a human estimate, the rebellion had many

[a] Ps. lxxiii. 4–6.

chances in its favour. Absalom was young and handsome, with a good address and popular manners; and the strength of the insurrection lay in David's own tribe of Judah, which probably thought itself overlooked since it had been merged in the kingdom of all Israel. It is possible, too, that David had, latterly, somewhat neglected those duties of administering justice in person which claimed much of the time of an Eastern monarch; while he cannot but have lost, and have been conscious of having lost, moral weight with the best people in his realm, by his sin with Bathsheba,[a] and by such scandals in his family as was the conduct of Amnon, his eldest and favourite son.[b] Although, therefore, he had no doubt of the justice of his cause, his conscience told him that, considering his past conduct, he had no right to be sure that God would uphold him; and he could not but remember the prediction that "evil should be raised up against" him "out of his own house."[c] It might be that, for his own sins, his sinful son was destined to triumph; it might be that he was himself to fall in battle, or to linger out his remaining years in captivity and shame. The issue of the contest was as yet beyond his own range of anticipation. But he knew that all was already determined in a higher region; that God had even decided whether his own life would be prolonged. So his thoughts naturally turned to God. "My time is in Thy Hand; deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me."

II.

The truth that God holds in His Hand each human life, and has already fixed the date and the manner in which

[a] 2 Sam. xi. 2-5. [b] *Ib.* xiii. 1-18. [c] *Ib.* xii. 11.

it shall close, belongs to the general truth that His "never-failing Providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth."[a] God's Providence is His purpose and care to preserve that order in the natural and moral world which He established at the creation. If we could conceive of Him as taking no care of His creatures, especially of His intelligent creatures, He would be nothing to us, and, except as a matter of intellectual curiosity, we should not care to know whether He did or did not exist. If He took no care of His creatures, the attributes of Justice, Goodness, Wisdom, and Holiness, which we ascribe to Him, would have no practical meaning; there would be no real basis for or sanction of morality, and religion would be an illusion resting upon sentiment. When, in ancient days, Epicurus allowed the existence of some Divinity, but denied God's Providence, it was observed that he only appeared to admit God's existence, and that in fact he denied it. And thus the first lesson which God taught man, when placing him in this world, is that He, man's Creator, is also man's Master, his Ruler, his Benefactor, his Parent; that He is not only a Being of a higher nature than man's, but the Guardian of man's life, the Rewarder of virtue, and the Punisher of crime. It is not a bad description of the Bible to say that it is a history of Divine Providence either generally or in relation to a portion of the human family. The history of Providence begins with the account of the Creation. That account displays the Creator as acting, not with the blind impulse which would become a fatal or necessary cause, but with the intelligence of a Being Who acts freely in what He does; Who acts as He does (to use human words about Him) with reflection, with foresight, with a view to the endurance of His work and the happiness of

[a] Collect for Eighth Sunday after Trinity.

His creatures. The world did not escape from Him without or against His Will; but "He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast."[a] And such as He was in creation, He has been ever since, and is at this moment; the Ruler and Sustainer of all life, as well as its Author.

The objections to the reality of God's Providence are ultimately two. It has been deemed impossible for a single mind to care for every created being, and every part of every created being. A Christian apologist has told us how a pagan, at the beginning of the third century of our era, would feel and represent this. 'The Christians,' says this critic, 'pretend that their God, Whom they can neither show us nor see, makes diligent inquiry into the conduct, acts, language, and secret thoughts of all men. They would have it that He is running about and to be found everywhere,—troublesome, restless, indelicately inquisitive; just as though His powers of giving attention could enable Him to govern the world at large and yet to take minute care of every particular thing. What a foolish illusion! Nature pursues her eternal course, without being interfered with by any divinity; the goods and ills of life light on the virtuous and the vicious indifferently; religious men are often more badly treated by fortune than are the ungodly; and if the world were governed by a wise Providence, the course of events would be very different from what it is.'[b] We might almost

[a] Ps. xxxiii. 9.

[b] Condensed from the speech of Cecilius Natalis, in *Min. Fel.*, Octav. c. 10–13. The most striking passage is at c. 10, p. 14, ed. Vindob. 1867: "At jam Christiani quanta monstra, quæ portenta confingunt! Deum illum suum quem nec ostendere possunt nec videre, in omnium mores, actus omnium, verba denique et occultas cogitationes diligenter inquirere: discurrentem scilicet atque ubique præsentem molestum illum volunt, inquietum, impudenter etiam curiosum, siquidam adstat factis omnibus,

suppose ourselves reading the pages of some modern magazine instead of listening to the current talk of a third-century pagan.

Such an objection is really atheistic. An intelligence which could not thus grasp the details of the created world would not be infinite in its capacity; in other words, it would not be God. More common is the notion that attention to the minute details of a universe is inconsistent with the true dignity of God; and when this error is advocated by uninstructed Christians, they sometimes endeavour to disguise from themselves their rejection of the truth that God rules all life, by distinguishing between His general and His particular Providence. They are willing to assign to Him a general superintendence of the laws which govern human life; but they cannot think that He interferes to prescribe the everyday circumstances that surround them—details which they consider too trifling for His notice. This is one of the devices of the human mind for relieving itself of the sense of God's encompassing Presence and activity; but men hide their real motives even from themselves, by assuming that they are mainly concerned to uphold His dignity. It is unworthy of Him, they say, to suppose that He can really trouble Himself with matters of such slight importance; it is enough for Him to enact general laws, and then leave all beyond to their silent operation, modified by the action of His reasonable creatures.

This conception of God's relation to the world and to life is, in fact, anthropomorphic. It is suggested by the experience of human potentates, whose exercise of their governing powers is controlled by the hard necessities of a finite understanding. A human ruler can only give atten-

locis omnibus intererrat, cum nec singulis inservire possit per universa districtus, nec universis sufficere in singulis occupatus." Cf. also p. 16.

tion to the general principles of his administration; he must leave details to his subordinates. But this does not illustrate his exalted position so vividly as it shows the limited nature of his faculties. If he could, he would attend to details as well as to general principles, since he would thereby show the really comprehensive character of his intelligence. A mind which can grasp details as well as principles is greater than a mind which can only grasp principles; among men, it is rare to find the two forms of power combined in any high degree of excellence. The Infinite Mind of God is as much at home in the minutest details of His government, as in the broadest laws which regulate its procedures; and to deny His particular Providence is to degrade Him to the level of a human governor, who veils a lack of capacity beneath a false standard of dignity.

III.

On Providence, in the sense of a particular Providence, in other words, the only Providence which is real, two observations may here be made.

First of all, it is especially prominent in the recorded teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He insists on the doctrine as part of His revelation of the Fatherly love of God, and He finds His illustrations of it in a quarter from which all fatalistic systems have eagerly excluded it—the world of nature. "Consider," He says, "the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?"[a] Again, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you,

[a] St. Luke xii. 24.

That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you?"[a]

These examples illustrate God's care in providing for the needs of human life; at other times our Lord insists on the protection which God extends to His servants in times of danger. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows."[b]

And if to human observers it is difficult to trace, in the provisions made for human life, that sharp distinction which might be looked for in the cases of the good and the evil respectively, we are taught that this very indiscriminateness is a note of the Hand of the Universal Father. When insisting that His disciples should love their enemies, do good to them that hate, and pray for those who despitefully use and persecute them, our Lord gives as a reason, "that ye may be the children of your Father Which is in Heaven;" and then He points to the share which all alike have in the blessings of nature, not through the operation of a blind fate or force, but by the express decision of a Living and Holy Will. "God maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."[c]

A second observation is that belief in a particular Providence is the necessary basis and warrant of prayer. And by prayer I mean prayer in its most usual and natural sense, namely, the asking God for what we want. Prayer is no doubt sometimes, and rightly, used for all kinds of communion with God; for acts of faith, hope, love, con-

[a] St. Matt. vi. 28–30. [b] *Ib.* x. 29–31. [c] *Ib.* v. 44, 45.

trition, trust, intercession, adoration, resignation, even praise. But its first and simplest meaning, in all languages, is a petition for that which we want addressed to a Being Who is able to grant it. Now, prayer, in this primary sense, is impossible, except to a believer in a Providence; in what people call a particular Providence. A being who only concerned himself with general laws and principles, and had no eye and care for details, for single human lives, single circumstances, single events, would not answer prayer. Accordingly, in quarters where belief in God's particularizing Providence has been lost, people have persuaded themselves that it is unspiritual to ask for specific gifts or blessings, and that true prayer cannot well be anything else than praise or resignation. Upon this it must be observed that, if such a theory holds good, the Apostles were unspiritual. When St. Peter was kept in prison, prayer was made, we cannot doubt by his authority, and without ceasing, of the Church unto God for him.[a] When St. Paul, at the close of his Epistle to the Romans, is giving some final instructions, he writes as follows: "Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me;" and then he proceeds to specify four favours which they were to join him in asking God to grant: "That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judæa; that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints"—in other words, that the Christians of Jerusalem might gratefully receive the alms which were sent them through St. Paul by the Greek Churches; "that I may come unto you" Romans "with joy by the Will of God; and may with you be refreshed."[b] These are four specific petitions; for deliverance from a given

[a] Acts xii. 5. [b] Rom. xv. 30–32.

temporal danger; for a particular state of disposition on the part of a particular Church; for a prosperous journey across the Mediterranean; and for a spiritual revival after his arrival at Rome. Clearly, we must say, either that St. Paul gave very unwarrantable instructions indeed to his Roman converts, or else that this theory of declining to make particular petitions, because a real spirituality of aim would confine itself to very general language, is as mistaken as it is unapostolic.

Every prayer for a particular blessing is indeed accompanied by the reflection that God, in His Love and Wisdom, may not see fit to grant it. All prayer has the tacit condition attached to it;—"Thy Will be done."[a] No one ever felt this more truly than the Apostle,[b] who yet prayed for particular blessings, because he believed in a particularizing Providence.

It is scarcely necessary to refer to the practice of the Church. What is the Litany but a long list of petitions for single blessings, temporal and spiritual? What are the prayers for the Queen and the Royal Family but an extreme example of this principle? These prayers assume, with the Apostle, that a given human being, the Sovereign, is such an object of God's regard that it is not wrong or irreverent to ask Him to "replenish her with the grace of His Holy Spirit, that she may always incline to His Will, and walk in His way; to endue her plenteously with heavenly gifts; to grant her in health and wealth long to live; to strengthen her that she may vanquish and overcome all her enemies; and that, finally, after this life, she may attain everlasting joy and felicity."[c] This would be wholly indefensible if God only concerned Himself with general laws; but if it is right thus to

[a] St. Matt. xxvi. 39, 42. [b] Rom. i. 10; viii. 28.
[c] Prayer for the Queen's Majesty, Morning Prayer.

follow the Apostle's instruction,[a] then prayers, equally specific in their purpose, may be offered for other persons also. It is unnecessary to point out that "prayers for rain," "for fair weather," "in the time of dearth and famine," "of war and tumults," "of any common plague or sickness," or "for the guidance of Parliament,"[b] are prayers that could never be offered without superstition, unless the doctrine of God's particular Providence, in the physical and natural as well as in the spiritual and supernatural sphere, were certainly true.

At this time of the year our minds and hearts are full of the Event which, beyond any other, shows that the Creator has not left the world to itself. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."[c] Each of us may, with the Apostle, claim our individual share in this supreme act of Providence; each of us may say, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me."[d]

IV.

When, then, David exclaims, "My time is in Thy Hand," he makes an act of faith in God's Providence in its bearing on himself. David means that God has already assigned him a certain measure of life, which will close at a given moment, whatever may be the issue of Absalom's rebellion. There are, indeed, three main causes which go to determine the length of time assigned to each human life.

Of these, the first is physical. Every man has a constitution, given him by God, which has a certain amount

[a] 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.
[b] "Prayers upon several occasions," Book of Common Prayer.
[c] St. John iii. 16. [d] Gal. ii. 20.

of vital power, and no more; which can bear a certain amount of strain and exertion, and no more. When this stock of vital power is exhausted, first one and then another organ gives out, the constitution breaks up, and the end comes. How soon it will come is partly determined by circumstances; in one set of circumstances it is delayed, in another it is hastened. But no circumstances, however favourable, no precautions, however careful and incessant, can preserve it for ever. The day arrives when they avail no longer. The stock of strength is exhausted, and the end comes.

And He Who gave to each of us the bodily frame which we possess, and has surrounded us with the circumstances which hedge in our separate lives, knows, and He alone knows, how long this His gift will last.

Not that strength of constitution is always allowed to be the measure of life; its course is not seldom arrested by a violent death. It is cut short in battle, or by the executioner, or by lightning, or by a railway accident, or by drowning, or by a murderer's knife, or by poison taken unwittingly, or by the bite of an animal or a reptile, or by "the pestilence that walketh in darkness, and the sickness that destroyeth at the noonday."[a] Now this sudden arrest of the course of life, as laid down by the apparent capacity of a physical constitution, affects us in a painful degree, especially in the case of those who are cut off in their youth and strength. And yet such events might suggest to those who sincerely believe in the Providence of God that there are other and more influential, although less patent, causes which affect the length of human life. These causes we now proceed to consider.

Every man has a certain work assigned him to do; and when it is done, or ought to have been done, he

[a] Ps. xci. 6.

makes room for others. What that work exactly is, He knows Who has placed us here. In the case of our Lord, the Sinless Man, there was no room for question. On the eve of His death He could say to the Father, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do;"[a] and again, on the Cross, "It is finished!"[b] But most of us can only gather generally from our faculties and circumstances, and not always quite distinctly, why we were placed here; while none of us can dare to say certainly, at the close of life, that the work which our Maker meant us to do has been completed.

Too many of us, alas! never really think of this solemn and most certain truth, that we are placed here by God, not merely to live for a certain time, but to do a certain work; a work which at this particular time, and in these particular circumstances, it is given to no other being to do. No question is better worth the most careful attention of a serious man or woman than this: "What is the precise work which I was meant to do?" It may be, in human speech, a work on a great or a small scale; although all work, even the humblest, is great when it is done for God, and all, even the greatest, is insignificant when it is placed in the light of His Greatness. It may be the saving of a realm, or the conversion of a people, or the propagation of a truth that changes the face of human life; or it may be the waiting on a single invalid, or the cleaning out a house or a stable, or the ringing or answering a bell, or the sewing shirts, or the making matches at the East End of London, or the selling apples or chestnuts on the Embankment. The outward form of the work matters less than the presence or absence of the ennobling motive. The lowliest work may be ennobled by the purpose of doing it for God, the highest may be irre-

[a] St. John xvii. 4. [b] *Ib.* xix. 30.

trievably degraded by the absence of that purpose. But however this may be with each of us, a day arrives when the work which had to be done has been done, or ought to have been done, and can no longer be done. And then the end comes.

For, closely related to this cause, yet distinct from it, is a third. Every man is here on his probation or trial: he has a certain number of difficulties to encounter, a certain number of opportunities of which he may avail himself; and these are measured out to him by a Perfect Justice Which will deal with him accordingly. When these difficulties and opportunities have been passed, in whatever manner, with whatever result, the end comes. Who of us knows when the last difficulty has been surmounted, or when the last opportunity has been rejected or missed? We do not know; but our ignorance does not disprove the fact. He knows Who made us. He has placed us here on our trial, and He removes us when we have passed it or have failed.

We see this especially in the Gospel history, where our Lord moves about among His creatures, as Divine Providence in a form of flesh and blood, putting into audible human words and visible human acts those rules of government which we generally infer from the course of events. Consider His dealings with St. Peter; the whole history of St. Peter's call, his commission, his subsequent fall, his ultimate restoration. Or take our Lord's relations with Judas. Judas went to his own place, but not until he had had, again and again, opportunities which he rejected. It might almost seem that the general tenor of our Lord's relations with His Apostles was disturbed in order to save the betrayer. It was for the sake of Judas that, a year before the Passion, the solemn warning was uttered, "Have I not chosen you

twelve, and one of you is a devil?"[a] Judas, too, had his feet washed by the Redeemer of the world;[b] Judas heard the saying, "Ye are clean, but not all."[c] Then came a more direct warning, while yet there was time for reconciliation, "One of you shall betray Me."[d] Once more, when the unhappy Apostle had entered into compact with his Master's enemies, and was in the very act of consummating his tremendous crime, there was a last word of most tender remonstrance, "Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?"[e] or "Friend, wherefore art thou come?"[f]

When the probation of Judas was over, he went and hanged himself; and when Peter's was over, he was crucified with his head downwards in the city of the Cæsars. But as each passed, through the agency of death, into the world beyond, how different was the outlook!

On the last Sunday in the year most people, with any serious purpose in life, take stock of the use they are making of life, as well as they can. Since last December another considerable portion of our earthly existence has gone, never to be at our disposal again. Those of us who are getting on in years cannot but think of friends or acquaintances, perhaps of many, who were here twelve months ago in health and strength, and who are here no longer.

> "Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
> Bears all its sons away;
> They fly forgotten, as a dream
> Dies at the opening day."

To some of us not one month has passed in the year which is now closing without bringing at least one such

[a] St. John vi. 70. [b] *Ib.* xiii. 5. [c] *Ib.* 10, 11.
[d] *Ib.* 21. [e] St. Luke xxii. 48. [f] St. Matt. xxvi. 50.

loss, while there are those who have parted with the parent, or the husband, or the wife, or the child, or the brother, or the sister, or the friend of forty or fifty years, who gave to life all, or almost all its earthly brightness.

And when we think of the men whom we have known only by name and repute, as living on the world's public scene, how many of these, too, have paid the common debt of our kind! We look abroad. Two emperors, father and son, occupants of the most powerful throne in Europe;[a] and behind them a long procession—ministers of state,[b] ambassadors,[c] generals who have conquered[d] and generals who have failed[e]; public men whose fame or conduct a few years since was in the mouths of every one.

We think of our own country; and here there is scarcely any department of human activity that does not miss some name that still represented a living force twelve months ago. Parliament,[f] the University,[g] the Army,[h] the Bar,[i] as well as the Church[j] and Convocation, recall men of distinction, whose place now knows them no more. Astronomy,[k] political economy,[l] painting,[m] architecture,[n] scholarship,[o] literary criticism,[p] travel,[q] no less than theology[r] and philosophy, all are poorer than they were a year since, through the withdrawal of active minds which have

[a] The Emperor William I. died March 9, 1888; his son Frederick died June 15, 1888.

[b] Duclerc; Mancini. [c] Count Corti; Count Robilant.

[d] General Sheridan; Count Loris Melikoff. [e] Bazaine; Le Bœuf.

[f] Mr. Henry Richards, M.P.; Colonel King-Harman, M.P.

[g] Rev. Dr. Okes, Provost of King's College, Cambridge.

[h] Field-Marshal Lord Lucan.

[i] Sir Henry Maine enriched law by philosophy and statesmanship.

[j] Very Rev. J. W. Burgon, Dean of Chichester; Rev. R. F. Wilson; Rev. Canon Trevor.

[k] Mr. Richard Proctor. [l] Professor Bonamy Price.

[m] Mr. Frank Holl. [n] T. Gambier Parry, Esq.

[o] F. A. Paley, Esq. [p] Matthew Arnold; Mr. Laurence Oliphant.

[q] W. G. Palgrave. [r] Rev. H. N. Oxenham.

done much to promote, or to illustrate, or to popularize them. Some of those who are in our thoughts were not unfrequently worshippers in this church, and, like ourselves to-day, on the last Sunday in the year. One especially may claim respectful notice, since in him we lose a sample of that disinterestedness and nobility of character which is more important to our common human life than even art, or science, or literature—the late Earl of Devon.[a] Not often or prominently before the world, and having to contend with his full share of those sorrows and anxieties which in fact do so much to equalize all conditions of life, Lord Devon was, up to the last, incessantly engaged in works of public usefulness or private benevolence. Few men, without ever courting popularity, have commanded such general respect from all classes of the community and all sections of opinion; from those who have only judged at a distance, and from those who have enjoyed a nearer intimacy. For few men have often seemed to understand more practically the high obligations of a name which for many centuries had belonged to history, or to exhibit more persuasively before the eyes of a democratic age all that is most truly elevated and Christian in the feudal idea of chivalry.

"My time is in Thy Hand!" If there be one thought which should take possession of our minds on the last Sunday in the year, it is, surely, the preciousness of the gift of time. If there be one consideration which can rebuke frivolity, and stimulate exertion, and kill in us the germs of sin, and bid active virtue grow in us, it is the consideration that our time here may be very short.

We do not know that another year will be granted us; any one of us may have passed the line which separates the living and the dead before this day twelvemonth.

[a] Lord Devon died at Powderham Castle on November 18, 1888.

That in such a congregation as this not a few will have done so is a matter of moral certainty. Who it may be we know not; when it may be our turn we know not. "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power." [a] "But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not making the very most of it: for the fashion of this world passeth away." [b] Our time is in the Hands of Perfect Love and Perfect Justice; while we have time, let us, if need be, awake out of sleep.[c] Our time is in the Hands of God; but "while we have time, let us do good unto all men, specially unto them that are of the Household of faith." [d]

[a] Acts i. 7.
[b] 1 Cor. vii. 29–31.
[c] Rom. xiii. 11.
[d] Gal. vi. 10.

SERMON XIX.

HOPE FOR A NEW YEAR.

(SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.)

ROM. VIII. 28.

We know that all things work together for good to them that love God.

ALTHOUGH these words of St. Paul do not occur in any of the appointed services for Christmastide, they supply us with an authoritative motto for one of the lessons of the season. Christmas has been termed "The Feast of the Divine Providence." Around the Cradle of the Holy Child, all is ordered towards a single end, and often in defiance of probabilities, by an overruling Mind. The exclusion from the inn, the flight into Egypt, the journey of the Eastern sages, are among the circumstances in which we are able to trace the Divine purpose. The temper of simple, uncomplaining dependence upon God, which is the correlative to a serious belief in His loving Providence, is remarkably exhibited in our Lord's Virgin-Mother, awaiting her high destiny with chastened, simple trust that all would be well; and in St. Joseph, her espoused husband, whose tenderness and patience in his perplexity is held up as our example in the Gospel for to-day,[a] and who was rewarded by the heavenly guidance which

[a] Sunday after Christmas.

relieved his anxieties. The festivals which the Church has grouped around the Cradle of Christ teach us the same lesson—that "all things work together for good to them that love God." For himself, and for his greater persecutor, Saul of Tarsus, St. Stephen's Martyrdom [a] was a blessing of the highest order. For St. John the Evangelist, and, through him, for us who read his Revelation day by day, St. John's imprisonment in Patmos [b] was a privilege which might rank with his lying on the Breast of Jesus Christ at supper.[c] And the Holy Innocents [d] throw light by their deaths upon one of the most perplexing features of the Divine Government; the sufferings of those who have never actually sinned. Above all, the Incarnation itself; the taking our nature upon Him by the Only-begotten Son of God; the stupendous act whereby the Eternal entered into conditions of time, and the Illimitable submitted to bonds, and the All-holy became a Victim for sinners;—this is the highest expression of that Love which presides, although not always visibly, in nature and in history; here is the fact, here the faith which makes us certain that everything is ordered for the good of the servants of God. If "God so loved the world, that He gave His Only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life," [e] it is not difficult to believe that "all things work together for good to them that love God."

I.

The approaching close of the natural year makes a subject like this especially welcome. In reality, of course, we shall not be so near our last hour on the last evening

[a] Acts vii. 54-60; ix. 1-6. [b] Rev. i. 9. [c] St. John xiii. 23.
[d] St. Matt. ii. 16-18. [e] St. John iii. 16.

of this year as we shall be when three weeks of the new year have passed over our heads; if, indeed, we should live through them. But it is probable that on the last night of the year we shall be, that even to-day we are, much more alive to the never-ceasing solemnity of the lapse of time, than we shall be three weeks hence. The traveller is constantly pushing forward; but he feels most vividly that he is doing so as his eye catches a milestone at the roadside; or, if he is swept down the course of some great river, as he watches some castle, or church, or obelisk on the bank. We are familiar with the lines which say that

> "Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
> Bears all its sons away."

We are borne along on the surface of those waters towards Eternity; and as all around us move onwards with equal rapidity, we do not generally observe how fast all alike are moving. The last day of a year startles us into a quicker consciousness of what is always true; we would fain, if we could, stand for a few moments upon the bank and see the waters rush past us.

The most careless bestow a passing thought on the last day of a year which they will never see again. The most unobservant chronicle a date which, in a hundred ways, makes itself felt, and reminds them that nothing here is really permanent or stationary. It is comparatively easy to give serious attention to the solemn lapse of time, the unsuspended ebbing of life, on a day when all the world is ringing out the old year and ringing in the new. The occasion, after all, does not repeat itself very often in the longest lives; in lives of average length, men have scarcely learnt its solemn meaning ere they have passed it for the last time, and have henceforth only to look back on it from the Eternal World. We do not, then,

to-day trouble our heads, with the philosopher of Königsberg, to inquire whether time is, after all, anything more than a form of thought, having no actual reality.[a] It is enough for us to know that days, weeks, months, years, do succeed each other; that institutions are created, flourish, and decay; that men are born and die; that events follow one upon another with fierce rapidity; that what has passed has passed for good, and will not return. And as we gaze at this continuous procession of incident and development, of rises and falls, of struggles and sufferings, which day by day makes up history, we ask ourselves the question, Is there a principle, an object, a plan, in all this? Is the current bearing all forward to an appointed end? Or does all move in some fatal circle, of which there is no outcome, no real interpretation in thought, or in nature, or independently? Is all guided by some brutal fate to which we must perforce resign ourselves; if we may, with dignity, if we must, in despair?

The Apostle answers this question by the statement, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God."

St. Paul believes, then, that there is a purpose, an end, to which events are tending. It is a faith rather than the conclusion of an argument. Reason alone, it has been said, might arrive at an opposite conclusion. How can we see a Providential guidance, a Divine plan of any kind, in the bloody game which chiefly makes up what we call history? How can we trace it in the conduct of generations and races who successively appear upon the surface of this planet, to make trial, one after another, of the same crude experiments, as if the past had furnished no experience wherewith to guide them? How, in the utter disappearance of ancient civilizations, in the insolent

[a] Kant, *Critik der reinen Vernunft*, pp. 418, *sqq.*

triumphs of trickery or force which are as familiar to ourselves as they were to our forefathers? How, in those failures of great causes, in that enervation and degradation of civilized people which make philosophers, like Rousseau, look back with fondness to ages of barbaric simplicity? It is true enough, my friends, that the purpose of God in human history is traversed and obscured by causes to which the apostles of human despair may point very effectively. Yet here, as always, where sight fails us, we Christians walk by faith, and we see enough to resist so depressing a conclusion as that before us. The course of events is not thus fatal, thus desperate. We believe in a future; we believe that all moves forward, through whatever failures and entanglements, to a predestinated end; and each race, each generation, each civilization, each class in society, does its part—whether we can accurately estimate such part or not—towards promoting that end. The very world itself has caught the inspiration of this one Christian conviction; the philosophers who denounce the Church have here appropriated one of her most characteristic enthusiasms; and literary men who would not on any account be suspected of faith in God are loud in proclaiming their faith in Progress.

II.

"All things work together for good." For what kind of good? The glory of the Maker and Ruler of all? No doubt they do. As nothing exists without His permission, so, in the end, even the forces of evil itself, against their own bent and bias, will have to do His Will and to ensure His triumph. "The Lord hath made all things for Himself;" [a] and, voluntarily or reluctantly, consciously

[a] Prov. xvi. 4.

or unconsciously, all things work together for Him. If it were otherwise, He would not be God.

But this is not what the Apostle here says; nor does he here go so far as to say that all things actually work together for the good of all human beings. Clearly they do not. Who would say that his wealth is serviceable to the debauchee; that his power is a blessing to the selfish despot; that his learning is an advantage to the writer who employs it to destroy the faith, or hope, or morals, of thousands of readers; that his health is for the good of the man who only adds, day by day, to the great account against him, so long as he is never brought to think why he is here and whither he is going? It may be true enough that in the original design,—the "antecedent Will of God," as St. Chrysostom[a] has termed it,—all things, all circumstances, were designed to work together for the good of all men. But, as a matter of fact, man must be something else than he generally is, if he is, in this sense, to inherit all things; if nothing that happens is to harm him; if he is to find in all around him sources of true blessedness and strength.

"All things work together for good to them that love God." Not God's own glory alone, but the well-being of them who love Him is the object of His Providence. Is this, think you, a presumptuous idea on the part of God's servants? Do they forget the greatness of God and their own insignificance when they imagine that they are thus objects of His especial care? No. God's greatness, as

[a] Hom. i. in *Ep. ad Ephes.*, where he is explaining the sense of εὐδοκία in Eph. i. 9. Πανταχοῦ γὰρ εὐδοκία τὸ θέλημά ἐστι τὸ προηγούμενον· ἔστι γὰρ καὶ ἄλλο θέλημα· οἷον, θέλημα πρῶτον, τὸ μὴ ἀπολέσθαι ἡμαρτηκότας· θέλημα δεύτερον, τὸ γενομένους κακοὺς ἀπολέσθαι. Cf. S. Aug., *De Spir. et Lit.*, c. 33: "Vult autem Deus omnes homines salvos fieri, et in cognitionem veritatis venire; non sic tamen ut eis adimat liberum arbitrium, quo vel benè vel malè utentes, justissimè judicentur."

we study it in His works, is not inconsistent with His lavishing the treasures of His Thought, the resources of that Beauty which is Himself, upon some of the least considerable things in nature; upon leaves, and insects, and animalcules, which our science is teaching us to admire as we ought. Is God, then, less great because His Love, like His Knowledge, embraces all that He has made; because He is not so occupied with the governing principles of His universe as to lose sight of its minutest details? And is man forgetful of his insignificance because he believes that the great God cares even for him? The child is not guilty of outrageous pride, when it turns to its mother with an instinctive confidence that she will nourish and protect it; and it is the childlike instinct in us which believes that "like as a father pitieth his children, even so is the Lord merciful towards them that fear Him. For He knoweth whereof we are made; He remembereth that we are but dust." [a]

At any rate, it is rejoined, this idea of God's special protection of those who love Him is degrading to men who cherish it. It reduces the highest life of the soul to a form of selfishness; it admits that Job does not "serve God for nought." [b] How much higher, it is added, is the moral teaching of the Positive Philosophy which bids a man labour for truth and justice, careless whether he is rewarded for his toil or not, or rather, finding his sole and sufficient reward in his toil! "We never," it has been lately said, "shall get a really disinterested morality until we get rid of the doctrine of a life to come."

Now, assuredly, the Positive Philosophy has not insisted upon the importance of a disinterested pursuit of good more eagerly than has Christianity. The love of God for His own sake, and not for what we may get by loving

[a] Ps. ciii. 13, 14. [b] Job i. 9.

Him, is not a theological or philosophical novelty. But God is more tender as well as wiser than our modern theorists; and while He encourages us to love that goodness which is Himself, for its own sake, He provides special motives for hours of weakness, special consolations for hours of sorrow. We need not, indeed we could not, in the highest sense, love God, only because all things will work together for our good, as a consequence of our doing so; and yet we may be thankful that they will, if we do.

'But you do not suppose,' men say, 'that God will work miracles for you. He has His broad laws for governing His universe; He is not likely to abrogate them in your private interest; and you are not very thoughtful or reverent if you venture to ask Him to do so.'

Certainly God governs by laws; but what kind of laws? Are they laws which fetter His freedom; which, once enacted, absolutely rule the Will That made them? Do the laws govern Him, and not He the laws? Then the laws are the real god of the universe, and the old paganism which substituted an inexorable fate for God was right. But if we are not prepared for this, then it is not irrational or irreverent to ask God to act on our behalf, when we can plead a lawful, that is, a moral or religious, motive for His doing so; and the belief that He will so act, is only the belief that the moral world counts with Him, the Perfect Moral Being, as being worth much more than the material world, and that, upon due occasion, He is able and willing to make the latter do the highest work of the former.

'But,' you ask, 'is this theory of all things tending to the good of the servants of God really borne out by the facts? A Psalmist may say, "I have been young, and now am old; and yet saw I never the righteous forsaken,

nor his seed begging their bread."[a] But does this hold good generally, and in our days, of religious men? Do they not come into the same misfortunes as other folk? Are they not plagued like other men?[b] Do they not experience the long line of trials which, in some shape or other, await us all in life; losses, sorrows, disease, death? Their love of God is no insurance, practically, against these things; they are in the same case as everybody else; and this notion of all things working together for their particular good is a fancy, a kind of religious affectation, which is to be expected from the Clergy, and which we all of us fall into in our weaker moments, but which is contradicted, sharply and sternly, by actual experience.'

If by "good" the Apostle meant material, visible prosperity in this life, there would be no denying the truth of this argument. Success in life is not linked to the love of God even in the majority of cases. Asaph complained that it was not so in his day;[c] Job was taught why it was not so in his;[d] our Lord was careful to assure His followers that "in the world they would have tribulation,"[e] and to proclaim the blessedness which may attend on temporal failure. But the good of which St. Paul is speaking is real, absolute, eternal good; the good of the soul rather than of the body, the good of the world to come rather than of this present world. The disappointments, the misfortunes which await those who love God here are so far from falsifying St. Paul's statement, that they illustrate its truth. Such misfortunes are not, in the Apostle's eyes, good or evil in themselves, but capable of being made good or evil by the dispositions in which we meet them.

For, after all, *why* is it that all things are said to "work

[a] Ps. xxxvii. 25. [b] *Ib.* lxxiii. 5. [c] *Ib.* 12–14.
[d] Job i.; ii. [e] St. John xvi. 33.

together for good to them that love God"? Because such love, and it only, can transform all circumstances into blessings. It may be that a man's circumstances have no very marked character one way or another. It may be that they are a series of crushing misfortunes. It may be that they are a succession of conspicuous successes. The love of God is the magician which extracts the ore, alike from failure and success, and makes all promote man's final and absolute good. No life is made up of such commonplaces that they cannot be made by the love of God to sparkle with the highest moral interest. No troubles are so great that they cannot be built into the steps of the staircase by which souls mount up to Heaven. Ay, stranger still to say, no earthly prosperity need perforce enchain the soul and dull all its finer sensibilities, and kill out of it its sense of high destiny, if only the love of God be there to extract whatever is of lasting value, and to cast the dross away. And why can the love of God do this? Why should it wield this prerogative sway which makes man in so true a sense the master of his future? Because love is the real motive force in the soul. Love, in its essence, is desire; and the love of God is regulated, purified, spiritualized desire. Each of us comes into this world with a certain stock of desire; it is the moral capital with which we start; and the question is, how shall we invest it? What becomes of it in a majority of cases is only too plain. It is squandered away on unsubstantial baubles, or on solemn impostures, as the case may be; on money, on station, on credit among men, on the lower appetites; it is bestowed on everything except on Him Who alone is worthy of it. And mark it well, my friends, desire is much more truly the rudder of the soul than thought. "Show me," it has been said, "what a man loves, and I will tell you in what

direction he is moving." We may think much of that which only frightens or repels; we desire only that which attracts. And, therefore, man is more or less at the mercy of the objects to which he gives his desire. If they pass away, or if he becomes incapable of enjoying them, he is ruined. If they are thus transient and perishing, they cannot work together for his good unless his real object is beyond them. If it be not, man is their slave, not their master. The love of God has this effect; it makes God alone the Master of the soul. Other objects, instead of usurping what is due to Him, are loved for His sake only, and help the soul to move towards Him. In this way alone they work together for its good. The soul which loves the Imperishable can never be doomed to real disappointment; earthly misfortunes do but intensify its hold upon the One great Source of happiness. The love of God is like high natural genius, which takes in hand the most formidable forces of nature, and bids them, while they crush savage men, do the bidding of civilized communities. The same set of circumstances may chisel out the finest lineaments in the saintly character, or the darkest traits of the desperate criminal. That which makes the difference is the presence or absence of the love of God in the soul.

III.

The year which is just closing[a] has been marked by some signal public blessings. As a nation, we have to thank God for a period of prosperity, in some respects, unexampled; for a certain diminution of pauperism in our midst, for freedom from war and pestilence, and, in particular, for the termination of our long controversy with the United States without bloodshed.[b] There are, I know,

[a] 1872. [b] The reference is to the settlement of the Alabama claims.

some of our countrymen who would refer to this page of our history as involving national humiliation. But, surely, it is not poor spirited, either in a man or in a nation, to consider attentively a demand which is made in the name of Justice, and to refer this demand to an independent, and, if it may be, an impartial, decision. It is only moral courage—the courage of man, as distinct from the courage of the mere animal—which is strong enough to do this; and we may rejoice that disputes which, in other circumstances, might have cost two great countries untold suffering and thousands of lives, have been settled by a peaceful arbitration, even although the settlement has not been so much in our favour as we might have hoped. The best friends of humanity must welcome the appearance of Christian rules and principles in the sphere of politics; and the year which has witnessed so conspicuous an illustration of this, will mark, we may hope, an era in the higher—that is, the moral—civilization of the world.

On the other hand, it cannot be denied that, both at home and abroad, there are causes for serious misgivings. At home the relations of labour and capital are as unsettled as ever. And when it was doubtful, three weeks since, whether London would be left in darkness at night, the most unreflecting must have been led to feel the pressure of the great questions which lay behind the temporary inconvenience.[a] Do not let us suppose that the fault is all on one side, or that great dangers in the future, threatening the very structure of society, will be avoided, unless those who have property and privileges are unselfish enough to consider the case of others who work for every morsel that they eat; unless the energy of a wise charity, and of a spirit of fearless justice, can keep

[a] The strike of the London gas-stokers took place in the first week of December, 1872.

pace with the determination to enforce order, and to uphold the supremacy of law. And when we look abroad, it is true that the war which, two years since,[a] desolated the fairest countries of Europe, rages no longer. There is the peace of victory; and the peace of an almost sullen despair. Alas! the passions which created that war are far stronger and fiercer than they were at the moment of its outbreak; and the most competent observers will tell you, that never within the present century have the political and social circumstances of the Continent of Europe presented greater cause for anxiety than now.

When we turn to the Church, there is a similar balance of hopes and fears, of matter for thankful joy, and of matter for grave apprehensions. It cannot be doubted that there is a more general anxiety to make the Church in this land less unworthy of her high vocation as the Kingdom of Christ manifested in human society; to make her a greater source of moral vigour, as well as of philanthropic blessing, to the country; that there is more faith in the Unseen, more sense of the soul's value, more appreciation of the dignity and meaning of worship, more zeal to promote works of mercy, than in past years. But there is another side to this. The old neutral ground of indifference, or of what looked like indifference, is being narrowed year by year; men are being precipitated in this or that direction, according to the drift of their most fundamental instincts, of their deepest convictions. If there are more earnest Christians in England than there were twenty years ago, there are also many more earnest opponents of Christianity. Unbelief is much more conscious of its antagonism to Christ; much more hopeful of getting the direction of the mind of the country into its hands; much more determined to attempt no less an enterprise than the

[a] The Franco-German War of 1870–1.

dethronement of Christ our Lord from His old place in the conscience of England and of Europe. We feel its icy breath in scientific treatises and in light literature; in daily periodicals, in casual conversations, and in earnest argument. And it is less careful to veil itself than it was; it often attempts no disguises; it does not deign to palliate or soften its real aims. Its growing preponderance is a fact which even arrests the attention of our leading statesmen. The recent speech of the Prime Minister at Liverpool could not have been made even two or three years ago.[a] In presence of this advance of infidelity—an infidelity which, in its most logical and vigorous forms, abjures altogether the Name of Christ, denies the existence of a Supreme Being, and the reality of a life to come—the divisions and controversies of Christians, however inevitable, must appear sufficiently lamentable; and the past year has not been behind its predecessors in illustrating them. It is needless to do more than allude to an important decision of the Privy Council, and to the serious struggle which has centred in one of the Church's Creeds.[b] God grant that these wounds may be quickly healed! Not less anxious is the whole question of re-

[a] The reference is to Mr. Gladstone's speech at Liverpool College, December 21, 1872. Explaining a phrase which he had used, "the incidents of the time are no common incidents," he proceeded as follows: "I refer to the extraordinary and boastful manifestation in this age of ours, and especially in the year which is about to close, of the extremest forms of unbelief. . . . It is not now only the Christian Church, or only the Holy Scriptures, or only Christianity, which is attacked. The disposition is boldly proclaimed to deal alike with root and branch, and to snap the ties which, under the still venerable name of religion, unite man with the unseen world, and lighten the struggles and the woes of life by the hope of a better land" (quoted in the *Guardian*, December 24, 1872).

[b] The Athanasian Creed. Some proposals to mutilate this Creed, or to remove it from its position in the service of the Church, were made in this year. They were, by God's mercy, defeated.

ligious education. It is, alas! too plain that the right and duty of the Church of Christ in this matter is in a way to be gravely compromised; and that we are only too possibly on the high-road to a system of compulsory instruction which will banish God's Revelation from the lips of our teachers, and, if it can, from the hearts of our children.

Of these public anxieties, it is true that they, no less than causes for public thankfulness, may "work together for good to them that love God." Social or political troubles may teach us unselfishness; religious controversy may teach us earnestness, without making us bitter. Probably these things touch some of us less nearly than the joys and sorrows of our private lives. No one of us is exactly what he was at the beginning of the year. We are better off or worse off; we have more friends or fewer friends; we have succeeded in our work, or we have failed. This man has come into a large fortune, or has acquired a new and influential position, or has made a successful effort in public life, or has placed his son in a house where the boy's industry will secure his future, or has married his daughter advantageously, or has finally escaped from financial embarrassments which have hampered him for years, or has attained the great object of his ambition, whatever it was. That man can only think of 1872 as a year of misfortunes; of financial difficulty, of family discomforts, of social disappointments, of conscious defeat in the battle of life, of loss of friends, of loss of heart and decay of hope. There are some in this congregation upon whom, since New Year's Day, there has fallen the shadow of a great misfortune which has altered the whole aspect of life, and which must make the years that are to follow utterly different from the years that have been passed. Never again, so they feel, can the soul regain the buoy-

ancy of earlier days; never again can the sun seem as bright, or the flowers as fair as they did when as yet the heart had not sounded its capacities for agony, and felt the iron enter into it at the side of some open grave. Nor will life ever be exempt from these liabilities. In the words of an eloquent writer, who, alas! owns no allegiance to the Name of Christ, "Perfect our nature and our social systems as we may, there will still be casualties to stretch us on a bed of anguish to which no human skill can bring effective or permanent relief; there will still be chambers of long and wearing sickness, where the assiduities of the tenderest friends cannot hinder the sufferer from wishing for the visit of the last, mightiest, kindest friend of all. There will still be bereavements of the affections, not always created by the grave; severances of soul for which there is neither balm nor lethe; vacant places by the hearthstone which no form again may fill; —and as long as generation succeeds generation, and families are linked together; as long as the young are coming on the stage, while the old are leaving it; as long as nature commands us to cling so passionately to what we yet must lose so certainly, and may lose so suddenly and so soon; as long as love continues the most imperious passion, and death the surest fact of our mingled and marvellous humanity;—so long will the sweetest and truest music upon earth be always in a minor key." [a]

Certainly, it must be so until the soul has learnt the secret of life which the Apostle gives us in the text. It is only when the heart is fixed on the Unchangeable that the continuous spectacle of human change does not sicken it. The really important question for each of us is this; whether we may dare humbly to hope that we love God

[a] Greg, *Enigmas of Life*, pp. 191, 192.

better at the end of the year than we did at the beginning of it; whether our prayers, our actions, our care of conscience, our secret and habitual way of thinking about life and death, do or do not encourage us in this hope. We may be sure that how it will fare with us twelve months hence in this respect, is the most important question we can ask ourselves to-day. We know not, indeed, what changes may await us. To many here, perhaps to myself, the last summons may come before another last Sunday in the year. But no circumstances, even the gravest, will really matter, if we have won the great secret of controlling them; if we know, with St. Paul, that we are "in all things more than conquerors through Him that loved us;"[a] if we are persuaded "that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."[b]

How, then, can we better employ the hours which call us all to serious reflection, than in an earnest petition, "Lord, teach me indeed to love Thee"? Much may be done, even in an hour, which will last for ever. "If," says a German poet, "a thousand years are as one day before the Eternal God, so, surely, one day may be as an eternity to the soul of man."[c] Spiritual revolutions within the soul, spiritual changes for good or for evil, have no appreciable relation to time; intensity, not duration, is the measure of their importance. May He Who has prepared for them that love Him "such good things as pass man's understanding," vouchsafe to "pour into our hearts such love towards Himself, that we, loving Him above all things, may obtain His promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord."[d]

[a] Rom. viii. 37. [b] *Ib.* 38, 39. [c] Claudius.
[d] Collect for the Sixth Sunday after Trinity.

SERMON XX.

THE NAME OF JESUS.

(FEAST OF THE CIRCUMCISION.)

ST. LUKE II. 21.

His Name was called Jesus, Which was so named of the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

IN this passage St. Luke draws attention to the high sanction of the Most Holy Name which was given to our Lord at His Circumcision. "He was so named of the angel before He was conceived in the womb." When the Archangel Gabriel announced His Birth to His Virgin-Mother, the message from heaven ran thus: "Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son, and shalt call His Name JESUS."[a] And when, at a later date, Mary was espoused to Joseph, and, as St. Matthew tells us, "was found with child of the Holy Ghost," so that her husband "was minded to put her away privily," to him too the angel of the Lord appeared, saying, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for That Which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall

[a] St. Luke i. 30, 31.

bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His Name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins." [a]

I.

The question will perhaps be asked why this importance should be ascribed to a name, even although it be the Name of our Lord. Modern habits of thought, especially English habits, lead us to think lightly of names. We contrast names with realities; words with things. And as to human names, we look in ordinary life not to what a man is called, but to what he does, or rather to what he is. A name, we think, may be but a shadow of the past, or a fruitless effort to influence the future. It is, we may hold, only the social label by which one man is distinguished from another, and it cannot be credited with a mystical significance without some taint of fancifulness, if not of absurdity.

That throughout the Bible a great deal of importance is attributed to names, and especially to the names of persons, is obvious to even the least careful readers. The names of the patriarchs, for instance, and others, are given them, each for a definite reason; and this reason lies in the natural meaning of the word itself, which is frequently explained in the context. Moreover, names are sometimes varied, or entirely new names are assumed; as in the cases of Abraham and Sarah. Unspeakably greater is the importance attached to the Name of God in the Bible. Holy Scripture bids us give the honour due unto His Name.[b] It says that His Name is great in Israel;[c] that it is excellent;[d] that it is holy and reverent.[e] Scripture speaks of men loving God's Name;[f] of their fearing

[a] St. Matt. i. 18–21 [b] Ps. xxix. 2. [c] *Ib.* lxxvi. 1.
[d] *Ib.* viii. 1. [e] *Ib.* cxi. 9. [f] *Ib.* lxix. 36.

it;[a] of their praising it;[b] of their seeking it;[c] of their knowing it;[d] of their declaring it;[e] of the temple being built for it,[f] and of its being put or set therein.[g] These and similar expressions occur not once or twice, but constantly. The Name of God is treated in Scripture as if it were a living thing; as if it were identical with His Nature, Which it declares. And in the New Testament the Name of Jesus is said to be the power through which devils are cast out;[h] and at which all beings in earth and heaven shall bow the knee in adoration.[i] Thus too we profess to our Lord every day in the *Te Deum*, "We worship Thy Name ever world without end."

Are we to account for the importance thus attached to the names of men, and especially to the Name of God, by saying that it belongs to the genius of an Eastern people, and that we people of the Western world can only recognize such peculiarities, but cannot hope to understand them? This is a shallow method of dealing with Biblical topics. For the real question is shelved; it is not answered. It is impossible not to inquire why the Orientals should have exhibited a given peculiarity; why, in the case before us, such importance should have been attributed to names. Is this question answered by saying that, knowing only a single language, the Hebrews ascribed to language an absolute power and efficacy as inherent in it; a sort of equivalence to that for which it stands; in short, a value which would be deemed absurd at the present day? But is it clear that the Hebrews were wrong, while we are right? May not Babel have been a misfortune, not merely in that it interfered with intercourse between human beings, but also because it lowered our sense of

[a] Mal. iv. 2. [b] Ps. lxix. 30. [c] *Ib.* lxxxiii. 16. [d] *Ib.* ix. 10.
[e] *Ib.* xxii. 22. [f] 2 Chron. vi. 34. [g] *Ib.* vi. 20; xx. 9; Jer. vii. 12.
[h] St. Mark xvi. 17; St. Luke x. 17. [i] Phil. ii. 10.

what language is? Is it altogether impossible that the knowledge of many languages, or of more languages than one, may impoverish our sense of the true force of language in relation to thought and fact? The most accomplished linguist of modern times, when replying to a compliment which some one paid him, observed that it was better to have ten ideas to express in one language, than one idea to express in ten.[a] And we may paraphrase his words by saying that it is better to feel one language, as the Hebrews felt theirs, than to use the words of two or three as mere counters. That splendid appendage of reason, for which no artificial or historical origin can be discovered, and which among the visible creatures we men alone possess in the gift of speech, was, at least in one respect, better understood when names were used seriously as in the Hebrew Scriptures; and it may be that if ever a universal language could be again established among men, a deeper philosophy would learn to attribute to the daily use of its separate words a real operative value which we too readily deem it wisdom to ignore.

But let us turn from speculation to the common sense of mankind. What is a name? I answer, It is a power. Not seldom has a name been a political force, governing the imaginations and swaying the destinies of millions of men. Why else did a long line of Roman emperors call themselves Cæsar and Augustus, until these proud titles lost their virtue by becoming entirely official? Or why was it possible for the late Emperor of the French to succeed to his uncle's throne, but because he bore a name which, until last August,[b] had a charmed power for the ear of France? Frequently a name is, whether for good or evil,

[a] Cardinal Mezzofanti.

[b] The earlier German victories in the campaign of 1870 were won in the month of August. The emperor had lost France before the capitulation of Sedan.

a moral power too. In every country, in every town, in every village, in every family circle, there are names around which associations have clustered so closely and persistently as to be inevitably accompaniments of them; names which invigorate and illuminate; names which darken and depress; names of dishonour and names of glory; the strong or subtle influence of which even the most prosaic do not wholly escape, while their practical power must be obvious to the least imaginative observer.

Think of this, ye parents who hear me, and who, among many and grave responsibilities, have from time to time to name your children. The choice of a child's Christian name is not a matter to be left to chance, or to be treated as though caprice or amusement might decide it. In the humblest walks of life every boy already possesses in his surname a moral and social inheritance; it robes him, that name, ere he has himself gone forth to meet the battle of life, with the genius and courage and industry, or with the sloth and incapacity, of his forefathers. The boy's surname is decided for him by the Providence Who assigns to him his parentage; he is named thus or thus in heaven before he is conceived in the womb. But what of his Christian name; the name by which during the years of his pilgrimage he will be most familiarly addressed day by day, hour by hour; the name which will help to shape his thoughts about himself and the thoughts of others? That name it is for you to fix upon him indelibly; to fix it wisely or foolishly, for good or for something akin to evil. Long after you shall have passed to your account, this portion of your work will survive you, as one of the happier memories of your life here below, or to add something to that sense of misused responsibility which will haunt you to your endless confusion hereafter.

Our Lord, then, entering this human world, submitted Himself to and accepted its conditions, and among these the power of names over the ear and the thoughts of men. And, entering it as a Jew, His human Name was, of course, constructed on the Hebrew type, although it was communicated to His Mother and to His foster-father by angels. It belongs to a large class of personal titles, in which the sacred Name of God, Jehovah, is connected with some one of His works or attributes. As Jehohanan means, "the Lord is gracious;" and Jehoiada, "the Lord is wise;" and Jehoiakin, "the Lord is the establisher;" and Jehoiakim, "the Lord is the setter-up;" and Jehonadab, "the Lord is munificent;" and Jehoadah, "the Lord is the adorner;" and Josedech, "the Lord is righteous;" and Jehoram, "the Lord is exalted;" and Jehoshaphat, "the Lord is Judge;" so Joshua or Jesus connects the most sacred Hebrew Name for God with the idea of help or salvation. "His Name," said the angel, "shall be called Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins."[a]

II.

We might have expected beforehand that our Lord would have chosen a unique name, unshared by any other of the sons of men. But He willed it otherwise. One Christian at least there was, almost our Lord's contemporary in time, who bore his Master's Name, Jesus the son of Justus.[b] Since that first age, from a feeling of natural reverence, the Most Holy Name has not been borne by any servant of Christ. But before our Lord came, His Name was borne, either exactly or with slight

[a] St. Matt. i. 21.

[b] Col. iv. 11. Jesus Justus was doubtless so named before his conversion from Judaism to the Church.

modifications, by captains, prophets, and priests; and it is important to see how these forerunners of the one Saviour anticipated, each of them, some department of His work.

Of these, the first, perhaps the greatest, is Joshua, who is called Jesus, as you will remember, in the Epistle to the Hebrews.[a] Joshua was a saviour of Israel; that is, Israel's real Lord saved His people through Joshua's instrumentality. The salvation which Joshua wrought was political and national. Israel, which as a race had been cradled amid the rich and settled civilization of Egypt, had been driven into the desert by the oppression of the reigning Pharaoh. Although protected from sheer annihilation by miracles of exceptional splendour, Israel was unsuited to the life of a wandering Arab tribe, and required a fixed home and territory for the development of religious and social institutions. Joshua, in the language of Scripture, was strong and very courageous.[b] He led Israel into the land of his inheritance, into the land of promise; he was a man of 'blood and iron;' his work was done when the tribes and cities of Canaan had gone down before the sword of Israel, in a tempest of destruction and death. But Joshua was not the servant of a dynastic or national ambition, thinly veiling the lust of power or the greed of territory under some specious pretext of patriotism or fear. Joshua could appeal to the sanction and support of Heaven, as no later conqueror has ever appealed to it, without risk of presumption or of hypocrisy. The moral justification of that stern conquest lay, not in the needs and aspirations of Israel so much as in the unspeakable corruption of the Canaanites. The social habits and the popular worship of the vanquished nations were penetrated through and through by evils which poison the springs of life, and cumber the ground

[a] Heb. iv. 8. [b] Josh. i. 6.

with generations incapable of being true to the healthier instincts of our common nature. Joshua was a judge as well as, and before he was, a saviour; but he was a saviour in the very act of judgment. As the instrument of the true and unseen King both of the chosen people and of the world, he saved his countrymen, from the life of the desert as well as from the swords of their enemies; and his work was the starting-point of that onward but checkered course of national development which culminated in the throne of David and of Solomon.

Is the Son of Mary a Saviour in the same sense as was the son of Nun?

Certainly we cannot say that He is not, without some important reservations. It is true that His kingdom was not to be of this world;[a] that He forbade His Apostle to use the temporal sword;[b] and that when, as has happened too often in Christian history, that sword has been unsheathed in His Name, He cannot without dishonour be held to have sanctioned it. But, although not a captain of armed warriors, Christ was, in the truest and highest sense of the term, a Saviour of society. The establishment of His moral kingdom among men, so far as it has been established, is the fruit of a struggle protracted through centuries, in which armies of hostile wills, intellects, and institutions, entrenched, like Jericho or Ai, behind the traditions of ages, have one after another owned His sway. Not that He, a moral Conqueror, has put such force on men as to crush their freedom: we obey Him freely, if at all. And therefore, because we are free to disobey Him, "the Canaanite is yet in the land."[c] Men speak of Christianity as a failure; they point to the torrents of blood which are flowing day by day across the Channel,[d]

[a] St. John xviii. 36. [b] St. Matt. xxvi. 52. [c] Josh. xvii. 12.

[d] The Franco-German War was not yet at an end.

and ask, with a scarcely suppressed irony, whether this Europe of ours is the kingdom of the Prince of Peace.[a] It is, and it is not; it is, in that He wields a vast moral empire even amidst this outbreak of sin and death; it is not, in so far as His empire is limited, as He Himself said it would be limited, so that even when He comes to judgment He will not find faith upon the earth.[b] But as the Captain of our salvation,[c] Who begins His work, not from without, but from within; Who writes His Law, not on tables of stone, but in the hearts of His people,[d] He is the true Author of the self-restraint, the truthfulness, the courage, the purity, the disinterestedness, the sacrifice, which save society. Say you that He has done nothing because He has not done all?

Ah! if you take Christendom as it is, flooded with light, yet too often preferring darkness; Christendom, with all its failures and scandals; Christendom, with its conspicuous disloyalties to Christ; and place it side by side with any non-Christian society, whether ancient or modern, you will see that Christ's beauty has illuminated even that which He has not yet transfigured; that the evils which exist are as nothing to those which without Him would have grown apace among us; that we are only as conscious of them as we are because He has given us a higher ideal, and has enabled us, more or less perfectly, to make some way in reducing that ideal to practice.

Again, Jesus is a name borne of old by intellectual deliverers. Such was Hoshea, the prophet of the Divine tenderness to sinful Israel. Such was Isaiah—the substance of the name is the same, though the order of ideas is inverted—Hosea's greater contemporary, who wrote

[a] Isa. ix. 6.
[b] St. Luke xviii. 8.
[c] Heb. ii. 10.
[d] *Ib.* viii. 10.

the Gospel in the form of prophecy. Such was Jesus the son of Sirach, who in a later age, when the Hebrew Canon had long since closed, and the thoughts of pious Jews were perplexed by their frequent contact, at Alexandria and elsewhere, with speculations rife in the heathen world, set anew before his countrymen the same wisdom which Solomon had taught, but with diversities of phrase and method suited to the wants and circumstances of the time. In very varying degrees these prophets and teachers saved their countrymen from ignorance. That was their mission. And to save a nation from ignorance, specially from spiritual ignorance, is to save it, probably, from presumption or from despair. Whoever adds to the stock of human knowledge, even in its lower branches, is so far forth a saviour of men. Whoever teaches us better to understand the universe in which we live, and the laws or rules by which its Maker governs it, and how we can best make use of it, saves us from all that waste of strength and from all that suffering which is otherwise inevitable. Whoever teaches us to understand ourselves, the secrets of our common and individual nature, the thoughts, the passions, the aspirations, the degradations, to which, as men, we are liable;—he too helps to deliver us from certain penalties of ignorance which are sufficiently terrible; he too, in his way, is a saviour. But when it is a question, not of human knowledge, but of Divine; not of the things of time, but of the things of eternity; not of the laws of the world which we see, but of the laws of that altogether vaster and more important world which we do not see; then ignorance is fatal, and salvation is precious in a very different and a transcendent sense.

Of this higher knowledge, the prophets, too, were, in their measure, ministers; the Holy Ghost spake by them,

and they saved men who would listen and obey. But their highest teachings were only anticipations of a time when the City of God should arise and shine, for that her light had come, and the glory of the Lord had risen upon her; when, although darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people, the Lord should arise upon her, and His glory be seen upon her.[a] Jesus Christ it was Who really saved the human race from ignorance of the truths which it most concerns man to know. Even a heathen poet, apostrophizing the old pagan philosopher, asks what it profited him to have measured the earth, and to have climbed the sky with his active mind, when he had to die.[b] Within two centuries after Christ, Tertullian exclaims that Christian children know the true solution of questions which philosophers cannot answer. Why man is here; whither he is going; what it is that affects in this way or in that his eternal destiny;—these are problems of undying interest, and upon them Jesus has poured a flood of light. We, the Gentile peoples, whose ancestors of old sat in darkness and the shadow of death; upon us hath the light shined.[c] Our eyes have seen His salvation, which He has prepared before the face of all people.[d] The true destiny of the soul; the judgment to come; the real terms of reconciliation to and communion with the One Blessed and Supreme Author of our existence; the twofold character of the eternal Future;—these are not secrets hidden from us. Jesus Christ has brought life and immortality to light through His Gospel.[e] Before Him, and contemporaneously with Him, and since His day, others

[a] Isa. lx. 1, 2.

[b] Hor., *Od.* xxviii. 4-6—

"Nec quidquam tibi prodest
Aerias tentâsse domus, animoque rotundum
Percurrisse polum, morituro."

[c] Isa. lx. 2. [d] St. Luke ii. 30, 31. [e] 2 Tim. i. 10.

have guessed, conjectured, argued, upon these problems, which are of necessary and undying interest to the sons of men. He simply unveiled the truth, and with an accent of authority which, as the people felt, was altogether wanting in the popular teachers of the time. He could dare to say with calmness, "I am the Light," not of My generation, of My followers, of My country, but "of the world. He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the Light of Life."[a]

Certainly a great deal of mistaken language is used about education in the present day. It is assumed that knowledge and goodness are the same thing; that to know what is right is always followed by a man's practising what he knows. That this is far from being the case, is certain to every one who has studied the statistics and history of modern crime; rather, it is certain to every one who knows anything really about himself. We know, many of us, that while we are encompassed by light, we are untrue to it, and by our disloyalty are gradually learning to shrink from it. "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil."[b]

If Jesus Christ had been only a Saviour from ignorance, He would but have increased the miseries of mankind; He would have been like the gaoler of old, whose torch first fully revealed to the condemned tenants of a subterranean dungeon the full extent of their misery, ere the heavy door swung finally on its hinges, and left them to their fate and to despair. But he did not thus do His work by halves; nor was the earlier revelation wanting in hints of what remained to complete it.

For one other there was in Old Testament history who bore this precious name; Joshua, the high priest of the

[a] St. John viii. 12. [b] *Ib.* iii. 19.

Restoration; the builder of the temple of the Lord. He was to "bear the glory, and sit and rule upon his throne, and be a priest upon his throne."[a] In His tranquil and majestic glory, the glory of a princely intercessor, the delegates from captive Judah were to see the earnest and outline of the promised Messiah.[b] Joshua the priest, ruling and sacrificing in the restored Jerusalem, was an earthly anticipation of our ascended Lord, King and Priest upon His Heavenly Throne, presenting Himself ever in sacrifice, atoning perfectly for sins, pouring forth upon His people rich streams of grace. "I beheld," says the entranced Apostle, "and, lo! in the midst of the Throne . . . a Lamb as it had been slain."[c]

Jesus saves us, not by sacrificing an earthly victim, but because He has died for us; because, as the Apostle says, He is "a Propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."[d] If we ask what made this death necessary, it must be answered that our natural idea of moral truth, as well as the broad lessons of history, represent suffering as a consequence of moral evil. It is a law of the perfect Being Who rules this universe that at some time or other sin means pain. But it is also His Will, read alike in conscience and in history, to welcome self-sacrifice; to welcome that free sacrifice of self which satisfies the penalty which sin must pay, not to any arbitrary caprice, but to the essential laws of His Nature. Therefore more especially does He welcome and accept the free sacrifice of the Most Perfect. It was the death of Jesus Christ which saves us, who cling to Him in faith and love, from the guilt of inherited and committed sin. That which gave His death such operative and cleansing power, making it thus radically to differ in its effects from the death of any mere man, is His Divine Nature,

[a] Zech. vi. 13. [b] *Ib.* 12. [c] Rev. v. 6. [d] 1 St. John ii. 2.

whereby all the acts and sufferings of His human Life are invested with a transcendent virtue and strength that could not otherwise belong to them. And as Jesus saves us from sin's guilt by His sufferings, so He saves us from its power by His grace. He gives us not merely His enfranchisement, but His Life; not His all-sufficient merits alone, but His transforming Nature. His Manhood is to His brethren, what the manhood of our first parent has been to every member of the race—an ancestral fount of life. We are in Him if, in a Christian sense, we are alive at all. We who believe, and are baptized, and love, and feed on the Manna of the New Covenant, are members of His Body, of His Flesh, and of His Bones.[a] We are associated with some of the prerogative glories of the Divine Saviour; we eat and drink at His Table in His kingdom;[b] we sit on thrones.[c] The Father has clothed us in His Robe of Righteousness and His garments of Salvation,[d] and has made us sit together with Christ in heavenly places;[e] since Jesus our Lord saves, when men will be saved, even to the uttermost.[f]

It has been said, whether in levity or in scorn I know not, that the old vulgar idea of saving the soul is out of date; that men are still saved, but only from present and visible enemies; from mental delusions, from gross vice, from poverty, from political oppression, from social wrong. Salvations these, good in their way, but wholly insignificant when placed side by side with the saving work of Jesus Christ. They may be in very truth all we need, if there be no hereafter; if that mysterious life which each of us feels and knows to be himself ends for ever at death. That is the real question; and it is tacitly answered in the negative by persons who deride the salva-

[a] Eph. v. 30. [b] St. Luke xxii. 30. [c] St. Matt. xix. 28.
[d] Isa. lxi. 10. [e] Eph. ii. 6. [f] Heb. vii. 25.

tion of the soul. Is there a life beyond the grave, and has it any moral relations to this? If the eternal world is a certainty, then even a plenary salvation from the woes and wrongs of time would only be a mockery of the hopes and needs of man. He who has ever felt what it is to live; who, in the solitude of his inmost being, has stood face to face with his immortality; who has shrunk from the misery of sins clinging to his inmost life, bringing to him not merely present degradation, but also an ineffaceable presentiment of coming woe in the after-world; such an one would rate at its true value this proposal to substitute deliverance from the ills of time for an Arm on which to rest at the threshold of eternity. The Name of names which was given to our Lord at His Circumcision meant more than any work that is bounded by any horizon here; and if He died to save us, it can scarcely be beneath our dignity to make the most of His salvation.

Whether each of us is saved or not is a strictly personal question. There are forms of improvement which affect men in masses. There are ideas and enthusiasms which elevate multitudes, just as there are mental nightmares and moral epidemics which depress them. And the religion of Jesus Christ exerts, beyond a doubt, a softening, civilizing, improving influence upon numbers whom yet, alas! Christ does not save. The Church of Christ, the ark of the New Testament, the temple of the new dispensation, encloses multitudes who, although in her, are not of her. They have lost their baptismal grace, and they have not recovered grace by repentance. We cannot be saved as if we were flocks of cattle, or regiments of soldiers. Jesus saves us, if at all, as single souls, each one of whom is severed from all around in his awful immortality, yet is united to all the blessed on earth and in

heaven when united by faith and love to Him. The ties which bind us to the Body of Christ do not interfere with the fact that the transactions whereby the Divine Redeemer cleanses, quickens, justifies and saves us on the one hand, and the efforts whereby, on the other, we seek, cling, submit to, draw strength and virtue out of Him, are solitary acts wrought in our favour, or wrought in our secret spirits with a particularity as distinct as though besides each one of us and Him there were no other beings in the universe. To know, to love, to speak to Him, as a real, living, ever-present Lord and Friend, is a personal matter, and without it the Name of Jesus has no meaning for us. When, in the holiest Service, we are bidden to "hear what comfortable words our Saviour Christ saith unto all that truly turn to Him, Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you,"[a] each soul must reply, in the consciousness of its solitary need, "Lord, I labour and am heavy laden with sin; do Thou refresh me." When it follows, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life,"[b] each soul must rejoin, "Lord, I believe on Him, Thine Only Begotten; let me not perish; bid me live eternally." When we are bidden hear St. Paul proclaiming that "this is a true saying, and worthy of all men to be received, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,"[c] each soul can only plead, "I am a sinner; O Jesus, Saviour of sinners, of Thy mercy and love, save me." When St. John assures us that "if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous, and He is the Propitiation for our sins,"[d] what

[a] "Comfortable Words" in the Order for Holy Communion: St. Matt. xi. 28.

[b] St. John iii. 16. [c] 1 Tim. i. 15. [d] 1 St. John ii. 1, 2.

can the soul do but cry, "Again and again have I sinned; but do Thou, O Thou Advocate with the Father, O Thou Propitiation for sin, wash out mine iniquities in Thy cleansing Blood"?

These are old thoughts, eighteen hundred years old at least, but well suited to the opening of a new year, even to such a New Year's Day as this. No year in the present century has opened more darkly for Europe than 1871. The most thoughtless are forced to think; the most frivolous are awed. Wisdom and benevolence might seem to stand aside as if they were fairly disheartened; while a tempest of passion, destruction, despair, sweeps across the fairest provinces of Christendom, leaving a long broad belt of desolation and death, and throwing, it is reckoned each day, even when great battles are not fought, two thousand families at least into mourning. Nor is the tragedy yet at an end; nor do the wisest pretend to say when or what the end shall be. They are at fault; they see at present no issue; no ray of clear sunlight upon the dark horizon. It may be that the scourge will spread; that we, all reluctant as we are, shall have to suffer it. If in other years prosperous men have thought this world too fair to give heed to the claims of the next, this cannot be now, and for us. Let who will vaunt the powers of modern outward refinement and civilization to conjure his brutal passions out of man; we cannot. Let who will believe that education, even the highest, in the things and thoughts of time, saves men from their worst enemies; we cannot. Let who will cling to the scenes of earth, as if they were final and satisfying; we cannot. God disenchants us with ourselves, with our age, with our boasted progress, with our supposed enlightenment, not that He may inflict on us fruitless humiliations, but that

He may lead us to the Divine Saviour. His Name, amid this scene of violence and blood, is glorious by the very force of contrast; it is "as ointment poured forth."[a]

Let us pray, and if it may be, work for our fellow-men with heads and hands; but let us make sure, as we may make sure, when kneeling in spirit at the cradle of the Infant Jesus, that He, the Eternal God, is our Refuge,[b] in time and for eternity.

[a] Song of Sol. i. 3.

[b] Deut. xxxiii. 27.

SERMON XXI.

THE CIRCUMCISION OF OUR LORD.

(FEAST OF THE CIRCUMCISION.)

ST. LUKE II. 21.

Eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the Child.

ON the eighth day after the Birth of Jesus Christ He was circumcised. On the octave of, or eighth day after Christmas Day, the Church of Christ keeps the Feast of His Circumcision.

Our Lord, as you know, is both God and Man. As Man, He underwent in infancy the rite which was enjoined by the Jewish Law. As God, He willed to undergo it. He might have ordered things otherwise. But He freely submitted, as to all the humiliations of His earthly life, and to death itself, so at the outset of His course, to the painful and humbling rite of circumcision.

In this submission of His, there are three points, among others, to be noticed.

I.

In condescending to be circumcised, our Lord gave His emphatic sanction to the principle that a feature of heathen practice or religion might be occasionally con-

secrated to serve the purposes of religious truth. For although in later books of the Bible the Jews are contrasted with all other nations, as the "circumcision" with the "uncircumcision," it is certain that from early times some heathen peoples did practise circumcision. This was apparently the case with the ancient Egyptians.[a] When circumcision was enjoined on Abraham, he would not have regarded it as a new rite; he had been in Egypt, and he must have known that it was at least common, probably universal, in that country. Circumcision, as practised by Abraham, was an old rite with a new meaning. The Divine promise is precise; "it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt Me and you."[b] This is in accordance with God's dealings in other matters. Some of the documents embodied in the historical books of the Old Testament are selections from annals kept by ordinary historians. Some words used by St. Paul and St. John, as well as others in the Nicene Creed, which describe truths respecting the Divine Nature of our Lord, had an earlier and a different value in the market of Greek thought. Some of St. Paul's arguments were Rabbinical arguments; they were learnt by him in the Rabbinical schools at Jerusalem, although they appear in his most anti-Jewish writings, such as the Epistle to the Galatians. In like manner something like the sign of the Cross is found in certain pagan religions; and our surplices, in all probability, came originally from Egypt. All this does not show that the true religion is, after all, only a conglomerate of false religions under a new form. It does show that a most important function of true inspiration is selection; that the Holy Spirit lays under contribution for His high purposes, various words, thoughts, arguments, customs, symbols, rites, associated before with false re-

[a] Herod. ii., 36, 37. [b] Gen. xvii. 11.

ligions or with none; that He invests them with a new and higher meaning, breathes upon them, baptizes them; and thus enlists them in a holier service. So it was with the rite of circumcision. And when our Lord submitted to be circumcised, He endorsed the principle that even a heathen rite might be consecrated to the service of truth.

II.

In submitting to circumcision, our Lord became obedient to the whole Mosaic Law. As St. Paul says, He was "made under the Law."[a] This was the meaning of circumcision, so far as man was concerned; it was an undertaking to be true to everything in the covenant with God, of which it was the initial rite. Just as in Baptism the infant Christian is signed "with the sign of the Cross, in token that hereafter he shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under His banner, against sin, the world, and the devil; and to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto his life's end;"[b] so in circumcision the young Israelite made a profession of entire obedience and devotion to the whole Law, moral, civil, and ceremonial, which came from God through Moses. As St. Paul says, "Circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the Law: but if thou be a breaker of the Law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision."[c]

Consider what this must have meant in the case of our Lord. Not only did He voluntarily submit to ordinances which He Himself had instituted, but to ordinances which had in reality no purpose or meaning except as referring to Himself. They were the shadows, He the Reality. They were an acted prediction, of which He was the Fulfil-

[a] Gal. iv. 4. [b] Baptismal Service. [c] Rom. ii. 25.

ment. They were but types, He the Antitype. They were designed to create in the human conscience, as St. Paul has shown, a sense of moral want which He alone could satisfy. Yet, as if He had everything to learn respecting Himself, and to feel the need of everything which He Himself alone could give, He submitted to them. He could not have done more had He been consciously ignorant, consciously criminal. And yet He could not have done less, if He was to represent us, in His Life of perfect obedience, as well as on His Cross of unutterable pain and shame. As He said to St. John the Baptist, "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness."[a] The painful and humiliating rite by which a Jewish infant was admitted to the covenant between his forefathers and God befitted One Who came on earth, not to do His own will, but the Will of Him That sent Him.[b]

What a lesson of obedience is here! When do many of us get into trouble with God? Is it not when we know that God has clearly commanded something which, however incumbent on others, we do not deem necessary for ourselves? We would fain know why the Abana and Pharpar of our own native common sense should not do just as well as the prescribed bath in the waters of Israel? We make our estimate of our wants, and not God's declared Will, the rule of our conduct. Of the real nature and extent of our wants we know little; we know not how far our obedience, if it really were unnecessary for ourselves, may not be needed as an example or an encouragement to others. Let us think of the obedience of our Lord to the law of circumcision. He, everlastingly One with the Father, could have dispensed with the symbol of covenant with God. He, the absolutely Sinless, needed not a rite which implied detachment from

[a] St. Matt. iii. 15. [b] St. John vi. 38.

impurity. Yet He submitted to it, because the Father so ordered; because we, His brethren, required the bright example and the moral strength of His submission.

III.

Our Lord underwent this rite of circumcision in order to persuade us of the necessity of that spiritual circumcision which was prefigured by it. This, the "true circumcision of the Spirit," is explained in the Collect to mean, "that, our hearts and all our members being mortified from all worldly and carnal lusts, we may in all things obey God's Blessed Will." [a]

Even the Old Testament teaches a moral and spiritual as well as a literal circumcision. It teaches that the heart, the lips, the ears, must be circumcised.[b] And for us Christians, the literal circumcision, which is outward in the flesh, is, as St. Paul says, not circumcision; [c] nay, if we were circumcised, from a belief that the rite is necessary, Christ would profit us nothing.[d] For He has come, and has given us a new nature in Baptism;[e] and, as the Romans are reminded, the true circumcision is "that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." [f] And the really circumcised are Christians, who worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.[g]

What is the essence of this spiritual circumcision? Surely it is the mortification of earthly desire. The great problem of life, it has been said, is to keep desire in its proper place. For desire is the strongest of the chariot-horses of the soul; in whatever direction we are being

[a] Collect for the Feast of the Circumcision.
[b] Deut. x. 16; xxx. 6; Exod. vi. 12; Jer. vi. 10. [c] Rom. ii. 28.
[d] Gal. v. 2. [e] *Ib.* vi. 15. [f] Rom. ii. 29. [g] Phil. iii. 3.

borne, it is love of some kind that carries us forward. Desire was meant to be the attractive force which should keep the soul true to that Perfect and Awful Being Who has a first claim on it; like those laws which oblige each planet to move, at whatever distance, round its sun. But, since the Fall, human nature has resembled a planet that had burst away from its true orbit, and goes crashing about in space, drawn hither and thither by the attractive force of other bodies. Desire no longer centres in God, but is lavished upon a hundred perishing objects, mainly upon objects of sense. And with this degradation of desire the soul is degraded too. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."[a] If the soul is drawn upwards towards God, it becomes gradually like God; if downwards towards the things of sense, it becomes like the things of sense; it becomes animalized, materialized, in any case degraded.

Hence the necessity for the circumcision of the Spirit. The mortification of degraded desire, of desire which no longer centres in God, is not the byplay, but the most serious business of a true Christian life. This is what our Lord meant by the searching words, "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee; ... if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell."[b]

Perhaps, on New Year's Day, some of us are looking out for a good resolution to be acted on, by God's grace, during the next twelve months. Can we do better than resolve to do every day something which we naturally dislike, as an act of love and worship to our Lord Jesus Christ, Who was made to be circumcised and obedient to

[a] St. Matt. vi. 21. [b] *Ib.* v. 29, 30.

the Law, for us men? Such a resolution, even tolerably kept, will leave us at the end of the year happier, because more disciplined and freer men than we are now. It will have enabled us to make one good step on the way to our eternal home. To which may He, of His mercy, bring us, Who was born into the world, and died and rose that we might be His in life and in death and in the higher life beyond the grave.

SERMON XXII.

THE GUIDANCE OF THE STAR.

(FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.)

ST. MATT. II. 1, 2.

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the East, and are come to worship Him.

ST. MATTHEW'S account of the Wise Men who came from the East and worshipped at the cradle of the Infant Jesus, is remarkable first of all as being St. Matthew's. We might have expected to find such a narrative in St. Luke. As a rule, St. Luke represents those world-embracing aspects of the life and work of Jesus Christ, which he had learnt to dwell upon during his companionship with St. Paul, the great teacher and converter of the Gentile peoples. St. Paul is pre-eminently the Apostle of the Epiphany; St. Luke would be its natural Evangelist. St. Paul, with his passionate desire to "make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God,"[a] might seem to us to be the natural fellow-worker with the Evangelist who should tell us that, when the Infant

[a] Eph. iii. 9.

Saviour was born, representatives of the wisdom of Eastern heathendom toiled across the desert to discover and to adore Him. Had this been so; had St. Matthew recorded the appearance to the shepherds, while St. Luke described the visit of the Wise Men, we should have been told, no doubt, that the events of St. Luke's narrative were not merely so selected as to illustrate, but that they were invented with a view to proving the truth of St. Paul's teaching. Therefore probably it is that, as a matter of fact, the one early event which justifies the action and teaching of the Apostle of the Gentiles is recorded in the pages of the Evangelist who was most intimately connected with, and representative of, St. James and the Jewish Church of Jerusalem. So little ground is there for the modern assertion that there were two or three different Gospels in the Apostolical Church, or that the Evangelists wrote that which, in obedience to such theories, they ought to have written, or, indeed, anything like it.

The Festival of the Epiphany must be deemed of very high importance by a believing and thoughtful Christian. It does not merely commemorate one of the most beautiful incidents of our Lord's Infant Life. It asserts one of the most fundamental and vital features of Christianity; the great distinction, in fact, between Christianity and Judaism. The Jewish religion was the religion of a race. If a man was born of the seed of Abraham and was circumcised on the eighth day, he was in covenant with God. If the blood that flowed in his veins was Greek or Roman, he was a stranger to the covenant of promise; he could at best, in some favourable circumstances, attain an outward connection with the religious system of Judaism, as did a proselyte of the gate. It was the consideration of this which led St. Paul to ask whether God was the God

of the Jews only; whether he was not God of the Gentiles also.[a] Was a merely national religion like this a full unveiling of the Mind of the common Father of the human family? Was His Eye ever to rest in love and favour only on the hills and valleys of Palestine? Was there to be no place in His Heart for those races who lay east and west and north and south of the favoured region? Or was the God of Israel, like the patron-deities of the heathen world, the God of Israel in such sense that Israel could lastingly monopolize His interest, His protection, His love; that heathendom, lying in darkness and in the shadow of death, would lie on in it for ever, without a hope of being really lightened by His Countenance, or being admitted to share His embrace?

It could not be. The Jewish revelation of God contained within itself the secret and the reason of its vanishing by absorption into the brighter light which should succeed it. Just as the Apostle points out, when writing to the Hebrews, that the Jewish ritual, when closely scrutinized, was seen to be pregnant with the sentence of its own abolition since it foreshadowed that perfect work of the One Atoning Victim, which it could not itself achieve;[b] so much more did that glorious and blessed revelation of God's Being and character, which the Law and the Prophets taught so fully and so variously to the chosen people, make it impossible that God should not manifest Himself to others. How would His mercies have been over all His works;[c] how would it have been true that He was Lord of all,[d] if all, save one favoured race, were to be for ever outside His kingdom of righteousness? No; Judaism, as a religious system, read the sentence of its coming disappearance in the handwriting of its greatest seers and rulers. "All nations whom Thou

[a] Rom. iii. 29. [b] Heb. ix. 8–12. [c] Ps. cxlv. 9. [d] Acts x. 36.

hast made shall come and worship Thee, O Lord, and shall glorify Thy Name."[a] "All the ends of the world shall remember themselves and be turned unto the Lord; and all the kingdoms of the nations shall worship before Him: for the kingdom is the Lord's."[b] "It is a light thing," so runs the prophetic message to Messiah, "that Thou shouldest be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give Thee for a Light unto the Gentiles, that Thou mayest be My Salvation unto the ends of the earth."[c] Or—to omit much else to the same effect—"There shall be a Root of Jesse, and He that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in Him shall the Gentiles trust."[d]

These anticipations were not really realized when, during the two or three centuries before our Lord, educated pagans at Alexandria and elsewhere began to take a deeper interest in the Jewish religion, and to detect in it a higher truth than they had known before. The first step to the fulfilment of the predictions of David and of Isaiah was made when the Wise Men crossed the desert on their visit to the Cradle at Bethlehem. That visit opens a new era in the religious history of the world. We Gentiles of to-day, who have gathered here to worship our Divine Redeemer, owe all that we have hitherto received from Him, all that we hope from Him in time and in eternity, to that grace which led those Gentiles of old to come to Christ's light, those "kings to the brightness of His rising."[e] Let us, then, inquire more particularly what lessons this remarkable event has to teach us.

[a] Ps. lxxxvi. 9. [b] *Ib.* xxii. 27, 28. [c] Isa. xlix. 6.
[d] Isa. xi. 1, 10; Rom. xv. 12. [e] Isa. lx. 3.

I.

This visit of the Wise Men shows us, first of all, how variously God speaks to us; how many are the voices whereby He calls us, if we will, out of darkness, whether of the mind or of the heart, into His marvellous light.[a] He uses a language to each which each can understand. It may be childish, even unintelligible, in the ears of other men; but it has a substantive value for us, if we will only hear it.

The home of the Wise Men was probably in Persia.[b] They belonged to the order or caste of Magi, who for many centuries represented the current wisdom of the East. They were looking out for some Deliverer from evils of which they felt the pressure, without being able to define and describe them. The historians Tacitus and Suetonius tell us that a rumour was current throughout the East which pointed to Judæa as the birthplace of men who would rule the world;[c] and this rumour would have gathered strength from the vague longings for a Saviour which were widely felt by heathens as well as by Jews. As St. Paul says that the Jewish Law, like the heathen slave whose duty it was to lead his master's sons to school, led Israel to Jesus Christ, the true Teacher of humanity;[d] so the natural law, written in the hearts[e] of the heathen, did a kindred work. It made the heathen conscious of

[a] 1 St. Pet. ii. 9.

[b] The ancients were divided between Persia and Arabia; the Eastern Fathers generally naming the former, the Western (through a natural interpretation of Ps. lxxii. 10, etc.) the latter; cf. Mill, *Chr. Adv. Publ.*, p. 375, note 66.

[c] Suet., *Vesp.*, § 4: "Percrebuerat Oriente toto vetus et constans opinio, esse in fatis ut eo tempore Judææ profecti rerum potirentur." Tacitus, *Hist.*, v. 13, thinks that the anticipation was realized in Vespasian.

[d] Gal. iii. 24. [e] Rom. ii. 14, 15.

that moral evil from which they could not free themselves; it made them long for deliverance. Thus many minds throughout heathendom were looking out for tokens of a heavenly Visitant, and their inquiries took the direction which their education and habits of thought suggested. Men who in the West would have inquired of oracles, tried when in the East to read the language of the stars. The opinion that Balaam's prophecy of the Star of Jacob[a] was still a sufficiently powerful tradition to shape the yearnings of these sages, is somewhat precarious; they simply tried to find in the heavens an answer to the profound moral yearnings within themselves.[b]

We know that astrology is a false science. It is impossible to connect the movements and appearances of the heavenly bodies with the affairs of men in such a degree and manner as astrologers have supposed. There are moral as well as other reasons for this conviction; but astrology, being, as it is, false, would not have largely swayed the lives of men unless it had been based upon a truth. This truth is, that the material universe is the servant of the moral, that is to say, of man. The stars are the work of the Perfect Moral Being; and His Nature is the measure of the relative worth and of the several purposes of the creatures to which He has given existence.

This truth is stated in the first chapter of Genesis, in which other creatures are represented as existing, not simply in obedience to some law of production, but for the sake of man. Joshua fell back upon this truth when the lengthened day enabled him to complete his victory

[a] Numb. xxiv. 17–19.

[b] The question whether the Magi were technically astrologers was warmly debated in antiquity. The affirmative was maintained by the heathen Celsus and the Manichæan Faustus. The negative by Origen, *Contr. Cels.*, i. 35; S. Augustine, *Contr. Faustum*, ii. 5; and S. Chrysostom, Hom. vi. in Matt.

of Beth-horon.[a] Deborah recognized this truth when she sang how the stars in their courses had fought against Sisera.[b] And it was this truth which ennobled the speculations of the Eastern sages. While in the East they saw the star of the King of the Jews. They saw, probably, at first, one of the fixed stars, to which they were led, in the course of their inquiry, to attach this specific value; and as it shone out on them night by night over their western horizon, they determined to walk in the direction from which it shone, or, as we should say, to follow it. They followed it, accordingly, day by day; night by night they gazed wistfully at it, and then rose to follow it again; they gazed and followed, and so they crossed the desert and reached the city to which even the heathen East had learnt to ascribe an exceptional sanctity. And as their coming became known at gatherings of the priesthood, and in the palace of the king, they learnt how an ancient prophecy had ruled that He Whom they sought would be born in Bethlehem.[c] And now the Divine guidance took another and a miraculous form. Between their Eastern home and Jerusalem, it was probably a fixed star to which they were led to attach a special meaning; but between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, St. Matthew's language is too explicit not to oblige us to suppose that they were guided, not by their own impressions, but by an object moving independently of themselves; probably by a meteor[d] which appeared to them to be identical with the star they had before observed, and which, from the nature of its movement, must have been preternatural. "When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the East,

[a] Josh. x. 12–14. [b] Judg. v. 20. [c] St. Matt. ii. 4–6.

[d] So St. Augustine, *ubi sup.*, "Novo Virginis partu, novum sidus apparuit."

went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy."

It has been said, by way of objection to St. Matthew's history, that God would not thus have appeared to sanction a false science by leading souls through its supposed guidance to a knowledge of His Blessed Son. But, apart from what has been said as to the truth which underlies astrology, this criticism proceeds upon a mistaken estimate of the nature of human events. In human events the good and the evil, the true and the false, are so closely linked, that the latter often serve for the point of transition to the former. God does not break this chain of events when He would act upon mankind; and thus we behold speculative error working itself out into the light of truth, and superstition paving the way for faith. Constantly has this been witnessed in the history of conversions to Christianity, whether of individuals or of nations; here a false philosophy, as in St. Augustine's case, there a stupid superstition, sometimes by contrast, sometimes by sympathy, becomes all unconsciously to itself, and even against its natural drift and purpose, a preparation for the Gospel.

Truly it has been said that man can more easily understand the Magnificence of God than the depths of His Condescension. If God had been all that His critics would have made Him, He would have been too careful of His dignity to help us out of our errors or our sins. We, in our short-sightedness, constantly prescribe conditions to Him under which alone, as we think, souls can be brought to know and to love Him. One man cannot believe that any can be brought to God unless the reasoning powers have been cultivated up to a particular points another insists upon the supreme importance of warm

feelings; another cannot understand a love of God which is dissociated from the sense of beauty and cares nought for art. Thus we men speak, each looking at the heavens, as our petty individual horizons bound them. But He, the Universal Father, Whose mighty Heart is open to all of us, Who knows each one of us as being what each really is, Who distinguishes with unerring accuracy that which matters little to our endless peace from that which matters much,—He sooner or later has a word for all of us. The star which one man sees and follows, is to another like any other star in the heavens. The influence of a friend, some public occurrence, a sentence of Holy Scripture, a family trouble, the arguments of a book, suddenly arrest attention. The soul reads a meaning where it saw none before. Are we to find fault with God for dealing with us as we are? Is He wrong, then, for taking this man's reason captive, and saying little to his affections; or for winning that man's heart, and leaving his imagination uninterested; or for stimulating the imagination of a third to apprehend His glory with vivid energy, while the faculty which understands the worth of an argument is dormant or almost unfelt?

Hush! Let us trust Him to do right in this matter. It is well that, as individuals, we are as little capable of controlling the flow and impulse of His grace as of regulating the rain and the sunshine. He may seem to violate our narrow rules; but He has a larger Heart than these rules allow for, and the day will come when we shall understand Him.

II.

This history teaches us also that truth, if it is to be grasped in its fulness, must be *sought* for, and that

earnestly. The Wise Men had a little stock of truth to start with; a shadowy tradition, a vague presentiment. This was their excellence and their safety: they made the most of what had been given them. Like the faithful servant in the parable, their pound gained ten pounds.[a] They did not put away from them what they knew or felt, as if it were only a scruple or a superstition, and not worth considering. They applied themselves first to the studies from which, as they believed, they could obtain an answer, and next to carrying into practice, by a serious and painful effort, the further duties which the answer imposed on them. They studied till they found the star; they left the homes, in which they were surrounded by wealth and consideration, to journey into a distant land; they reached its capital, and having ascertained that the object of their search was to be found beyond, they set out again. They might too easily have given up inquiry when it became evident that to complete it would be costly and fatiguing; they might have persuaded themselves that if Jerusalem did not reward their efforts it was folly to travel on to a provincial town, and that they had better return. They succeeded because they did not yield to these temptations. They persevered until they had found.

This is a consideration which needs to be insisted on. To neglect it is to run the risk of religious presumption on the one hand, or of religious despair on the other.

It has been said that "English people often appear to take it for granted that religious knowledge comes, whether by accident or as a matter of course, to every one who takes any interest in religion." Yet no man of prudence, who has not given much time to reading law, would feel that he could express an opinion on a

[a] St. Luke xix. 16.

difficult legal question; he would expose himself by doing so to ridicule, if to nothing worse. No sensible man, who had not studied the human frame, and the laws which govern it, and the chemical substances which so variously act upon it, would commit himself, offhand, to an opinion upon the nature of an alarming disease, or upon the true methods of treating it; he would fear to endanger a human life by his ignorant presumption. But too often, in religious matters, we have no doubt about our perfect capacity for deciding, without any hesitation, any question that may come before us, although we have never given it serious attention, and really resemble a blind man discussing art in a picture-gallery, or, rather, a child playing marbles on the edge of a precipice. We assume that, somehow, we know all about the question before us; and that we can form opinions, and act on them, and persuade others to act on them, without absurdity or danger.

"Yes," you reply, "but does not God send His Holy Spirit to teach those that ask Him?" Doubtless He does. But He does not so bestow that precious Gift as to make it needless for us to exert ourselves, or to use the other aids which He has given us. The star, with its high significance, was a gift of God. But the Wise Men did not think that the sight of the star rendered any further effort unnecessary, or that they would do some dishonour to the Heavenly Giver if they followed the path along which He seemed to lead. There is no spirituality in religious torpor. It is an Apostle who cries, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." [a]

Still less can the light of natural conscience be pleaded as a reason for making no effort to know and serve its author. Most true it is that God does give to every man, at the outset of life, a certain elementary knowledge of

[a] Gal. v. 25.

Himself. The star which might lead to the cradle of the Divine Infant shines at some time into every human conscience. God endows us all, without exception, with the sense and perception of a distinction and a law; the distinction between right and wrong, whatever right and wrong may be; and the law of obedience to right, when once it is discovered. And if a man makes the most of this endowment, instead of shunning or scorning or doing it violence; if he allows himself to reflect that such inward legislation implies a Lawgiver, and to search for other traces of His Presence and action; then, assuredly, is he on the way to learn more. Men often ask why when St. Paul preached at Athens or Corinth eighteen hundred years ago, or when a missionary preaches to-day in India or in Africa, one heathen listens with thankful interest, while another turns away in anger or disgust. And the answer may be, that the one has made the most of the gift of natural light within him, while the other has not. The one has dwelt on the faint glimmer of truth, rejoicing in it, longing that it might become brighter, wondering whence it came, and what can be known of its Author; and therefore, when a messenger from that Author, who can show trustworthy credentials, comes to tell him more, he listens and believes. The other has felt haunted and disquieted by the inward light; he has wished it extinguished. And who does not know that such wishes will in the end prevail? God leaves those who will away with Him to the darkness which they prefer. And therefore, when Christ's Apostle speaks to such an one, he speaks a language which the soul has no ears to hear. Micah's prophecy of the coming glories of Bethlehem[a] would have seemed to the Wise Men the wildest nonsense, had they not seen and followed

[a] Mic. v. 2; St. Matt. ii. 5, 6.

the star in the East. Our knowledge of higher truth depends on our fidelity to lower truths; on our making the most of whatever we may know at starting, and making good each step in our advance.

This is the law of God's kingdom to the end of time. "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken, even that which he seemeth to have."[a] And to "have" is to make the most of that which God gives; to possess with conscious joy at the possession; to seek that which lies beyond whatever we already possess. "If thou criest after knowledge," says the Wise Man, "and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest for her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God."[b]

Here also is a safeguard, not only against presumption, but against despair. God gives some light at some time to all; and if we follow it, it will lead us on. Here is a man who has been thrown early in life into a society where every objection that can be urged against Revelation has been continually repeated. He has fairly lost his way. It seems to him, for the moment, that if you are honest and educated, and if you are not a clergyman and so committed to a religious view of things, you must admit that there is more to be said for the materialistic account of the universe than for the Christian. He sets aside the grave difficulties of materialism by labelling them with the phrase, "Insoluble questions;" and for the rest he determines, like the pagan of old, "to snatch joyfully the gifts of the passing hour, and let alone the sterner aspects of life." But it cannot be. Human nature is too great, even in its corruption, permanently to acquiesce

[a] St. Luke viii. 18. [b] Prov. ii. 3–5.

in mere animalism; and his brute repose is disturbed from time to time by voices from a higher world, which echo, in plaintive agony, through the depths of his soul. At such times he would, he says, thankfully believe as Christians believe. But, then, he is not master of his convictions now; he cannot. It is happier, he admits, to be a believer. But, then, he is a hero and martyr of scepticism; or he is a victim of necessities which he cannot control. Ah, my brother! upon you too the star of the King of the Jews is shining, if you will but see it. There are facts of the spiritual world—such as your personality, your conscience, your free will—which your materialism cannot stamp out; which elude, in the last analysis, both the instruments of its anatomists and the logic of its dialecticians; and which, if you will only gaze persistently at any one of them, will reveal to you in all its beauty that world of spirit which exists alongside of, while it transcends, the world of matter. And of that spiritual world, Christ, and Christ alone, is King; of its mysterious problems, of its heights and depths, He alone is Master; so that as you cross the desert of inquiry which your one conviction, honestly pondered on, suggests, it shall lead you, like the star of old, to the cradle of the King of kings; and you too shall say in the end, "I have seen His star in the East, and am come to worship Him."

Or, here is a man who has got into bad company. He has lost all hold on what he once knew of the laws of God, and even of the laws of man. He utters blasphemy hour after hour with the punctilious regularity that governs the courtesies of good society. And as he wills not to retain God in his knowledge, God seems to have given him over, for the time, to a reprobate mind.[a] To

[a] Rom. i. 28.

him sin is a trade in which he sees nothing to condemn except the unskilfulness which may bring it under the strong arm of the law. To him sin is an enthusiasm; he is the propagandist and apostle of unrighteousness; he is a very crusader against morality and truth; he works all uncleanness with greediness.[a] This, you will say, is an exaggeration. Would that it were an exaggeration: it is hard matter of fact. Between such an one as this, and the souls who love and worship our Divine Redeemer, there is an almost countless number of characters in whom light and darkness are blended in varying proportions. Yet the veriest profligate has his opportunity sooner or later; some word, some example, some passing inward aspiration, may be his star in the East, if he only will. Doubtless, to cross the desert is for him no easy matter; he has to break with habit, to resist weakness, to be deaf to ridicule. These things are hard for flesh and blood. Yet there it shines, the star of the King, bidding him hope and persevere; and everything depends, after the grace which has visited and is yet with him, upon his perseverance. Surely, when in moments of weakness he fears that all must give way, and that he must sink back into the darkness from which he is struggling forth towards the day, there is heard within him an assurance to which the outward encouragement is a welcome countersign: "Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."[b]

[a] Eph. iv. 19. [b] Isa. xliii. 1, 2.

III.

A last lesson which this history teaches us is the real object of religious inquiry. "We have seen His star in the East, and are come to worship Him." Even Herod, insincere as he was, could not but adopt a language which imposed itself upon his natural conscience, when he bade the sages continue their journey: "When ye have found Him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also." [a] Accordingly, we are told that "when they were come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh." [b]

In our day a great deal of use is made of the phrase, "religious thought." We hear of the forms of religious thought, the progress of religious thought, the development of religious thought, the results of religious thought; as if religion was pre-eminently, if not essentially, thought; as if a religious man was before all things else a thinker; as if when he had reached certain speculative conclusions all was well, for time and for eternity. Nor may we deny that a religious man, especially if his understanding has been trained and exercised, will be a thoughtful man. He is bound to use his thought as well as, or rather beyond, his other faculties, to God's honour and glory. He can scarcely, if he would, decline exercising thought upon that one Object, compared with Whom all else is insignificant. It is impossible that when such great themes as God, eternity, the soul, life and death, have opened out upon his mind, he should not think of

[a] St. Matt. ii. 8. [b] *Ib.* 11.

them often and deeply, if he is capable of thought at all. But this is a very different thing from saying that the exercise of thought is the essential thing in religion. For Holy Scripture and the Church represent the objects of religious thought as fixed, occupying a definite area, on the highest authority, and quite as much beyond the control and manipulation of human thought as are the sun or the fixed stars, although suggesting boundless matter for adoring contemplation. And, indeed, according to Holy Scripture, the essence of religion is not so much thought as practice. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." [a] In point of fact, thought is one side of the religious action of the soul, or of the action of the Holy Spirit within the soul, while practice is the other. Thought without practice soon becomes an irreligious philosophy, and practice without thought a soulless mechanism. Here the question arises, What is the meeting-point between thought and practice? What is the act, if there be any act, in which thought learns to be practical, and in which practice gains strength, motive, intensity, by copartnership with thought? I answer, Worship. For worship is the joint result of thought and affection and will, simultaneously rising towards God, and then sinking into the dust before Him. There is no such thing as worship, without thought, on the one hand, realizing its Object; and affection and will, on the other, rescuing thought from wasting away into thin, profitless, perhaps irreverent, speculation, by embracing that Object. And this is why worship so fructifies and strengthens the soul; why it is, in fact, the central and representative act of the soul's religious, that

[a] St. James i. 27.

is, its true and highest, life. It is much more than mere religious thought; it is the stimulant and guide of religious practice. It is the soul, with all its powers, seeking the true Centre of the spiritual universe; it is the soul realizing the original Source, the destined End, and the present Object of its existence, by an act so comprehensive as to enlist all its faculties, so intense as to tax them when enlisted, even to the uttermost.

Thus it was that when the Wise Men had found Him to Whom the star had guided them, they fell down and worshipped Him. They fell down. They did not sit up, as if nothing great was before them; or on the foolish supposition that the body has no relation to the soul, and that while the soul is cleaving unto the dust before the Majesty of God, there is no reason why the body should not lounge and loll on a chair in a posture of easy, if not of studied, indifference. They fell down and worshipped; the outward act corresponding to, and being dictated by, the inward self-prostration, just as the Hebrew word for adoration implies the prostration of the adoring soul. Say you that this prostration was only Oriental? Was it not rather profoundly human, and should we not do well to note it? Ah! brethren, methinks we have much to learn of these Eastern sages; we who, like them, come into the presence of the King of kings, but who, unlike them, think it perhaps proof of a high spirituality to behave before Him as we should not think of behaving in the presence of our earthly superiors. Do we murmur that God looks not at the bowed head or at the bent knee, but at the heart"? No doubt He does look at the heart; but the question is whether it is possible for the heart to be engaged in worship while the posture of the body suggests irreverent sloth. Burke has shown, what must be apparent to every man of reflection and sense, that

between the postures of the body and the emotions of the soul there is an intimate correspondence. You cannot, as a matter of physical fact, feel a sinner's self-abasement before the Sanctity of God, while you stretch yourself out in a chair with your arms crossed, and your eyes gazing listlessly at any object that may meet them. Doubtless the old and the weak may worship without prostrations, to which their bodies are no longer equal. For the young and strong to attempt this is to trifle not merely with the language of Scripture, but with the laws of our composite nature. Be sure, brethren, that irreverence is not a note of spirituality. Reverence is the true language of faith, which sees God and adores Him. Irreverence is the symptom of unbelief or of indifference. When the soul's eye is closed to the Magnificence of God, the outward actions of worship are barely endured or contemptuously rejected as though they were lifeless forms.

But there was much more than this reverent outward homage in the worship of those Eastern sages. They proved their sincerity by their gifts; "gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."[a] These were material symbols of things yet more precious; of His Sovereignty, His Godhead, His Sufferings;[b] of their love, their piety, their self-denial. Their inquiry ended in discovery; and when they had found Christ, they did not curiously examine Him as if He was the solution of an intellectual puzzle; they worshipped Him as their King and their God. We may look on the material sun, in his brightness or in his eclipse, as day by day we learn to know more of him, and our highest knowledge ever stops at the stage of

[a] St. Matt. ii. 11.

[b] Sedulius, *Pasch. Op.*, ii. 87—

"Aurea nascenti fuderunt munera Regi
Thura dedere Deo, myrrham tribuere sepulchro."

intelligent wonder; for this sun is but a creature, after all, and he only reflects the glory of that Uncreated and awful Being Who made him. But at the Feet of the Sun of the moral world, of the Sun of Righteousness,[a] it is, it must be, otherwise. At His Feet we have reached the very frontier and source of being; and to gaze without worship—true, inward, utter self-prostration before Him—is to deny the truth of what our spirits see. May He grant to each of us who needs it at this blessed season, some star of His Epiphany, some tongue of fire that comes from Heaven; and may we watch until we follow it; and follow it, though amid discouragements, yet perseveringly, until we find Him, Whose messenger and evangelist it is!

Oh! send out Thy light and Thy truth, Eternal Jesus, and bring us, at this blessed season, unto Thy holy hill and to Thy dwelling; and we will go, in this our pilgrimage through time, to the Altar of God, even unto the God of our joy and gladness; and, through Thy grace and mercy, in the eternity beyond, upon the harp will we give thanks unto Thee, O Lord our God.[b]

[a] Mal. iv. 2. [b] Ps. xliii. 3, 4.

SERMON XXIII.

THE GLORY OF CHRIST AT CANA.

(SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.)

ST. JOHN II. 11.

This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory.

THE Epiphany of Christ, in the wide range of the phrase, includes a great deal more than was suggested by the incident which we were considering last Sunday,[a] when we saw how, as an Infant at Bethlehem, He was made known to the pilgrim-sages of the Gentile world. The manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles means, practically, His manifestation to the human race; and this naturally and immediately suggests the question, What was it that was manifested in the manifestation of Christ? All that presented itself to the senses of the Wise Men was the Form of an Infant; their faith seized, whether more or less distinctly, that which was veiled beneath the Form which met their eyes.

Now, what it was that was manifested in the manifestation of Christ, is taught us in the Gospels for the two first Sundays after the Epiphany. In the Gospel for the first Sunday, the gradual increase of our Lord's Human Soul in wisdom and knowledge, so far as these depend

[a] Serm. xxii.

upon experience, is set before us in St. Luke's narrative of His dispute with the Jewish doctors in the temple, at the age of twelve. That He had a Human Body was plain to the senses of men; but here was proof that He had also a Soul which was truly Human. In to-day's Gospel St. John tells us how, at the beginning of the miracles which Jesus wrought in Cana of Galilee, He manifested forth His glory.

What did St. John mean by the "glory" which our Lord manifested in this first miracle? "Glory" is one of those words which we use in our common language with great latitude and haziness of meaning; and we sometimes carry our vagueness into the interpretation of Scripture, when Scripture has a precise and definite meaning, if we will only take the pains to ascertain it.

St. John, then, in writing his Gospel, has at heart one main object. He is anxious to show that Jesus of Nazareth can only be understood, and indeed that His human character can only be revered, when men recognize in Him a Divine Person, Who existed before His birth into the world, and Who altogether transcends the ordinary conditions of human life. This Divine Person St. John calls the Word;[a] that is, the Everlasting Reason or Thought of God, having a tendency, like thought or reason in man, to express itself in some outward form, such as is human speech. As human thought takes shape in language, and thus strikes the sense of hearing, so the Everlasting and Personal Thought of God, entering into conditions of time, clothed Itself in a human form, and appealed, not merely to the sense of hearing, but to the senses of sight and touch. This Word, St. John tells us, is the Light;[b] the absolute Light, from Whom all truth radiates. And the "glory" of which St. John speaks is a

[a] St. John i. 1; 1 St. John i. 1. [b] St. John i. 4, 9.

radiation from this Light. "The Word was made flesh," says the Apostle, "and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory."[a] Generally speaking, during His tabernacling upon earth in a human Form, this "glory" of the Word was hidden; the earth-bound eyes of men could not see it. "The Light shined in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not."[b] But on certain occasions It was manifested, at least to the eyes of the disciples. "*The* Life"—the absolute Life, Who is also the Light—"was manifested, and we have seen It, and declare and show unto you that Eternal Life, Which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us."[c] Now, the miracle of Cana was an occasion when this "glory"—radiating from His Divine and Eternal Person, shrouded under a veil of flesh—poured forth its rays through the acts and words of Jesus of Nazareth. The "glory" of Christ in this passage is His Divine glory; it is the beauty and effulgence of His Divine attributes, although translated into forms which bring them within the reach of the human senses; and when St. John says that our Lord "manifested" this "glory," he implies that, although it had been almost entirely hidden for many years, yet that, like the sun behind the clouds on a dark day, it had all along been lying below the surface of our Lord's life, and, indeed, giving forth light, the source of which men did not recognize. Thus the miracle of Cana was, in the Evangelist's eyes, of the nature of a discovery; it was the rolling away of a cloud from the face of the sun.

Let us recall briefly the circumstances in which this miracle was wrought. St. John says that it took place three days after the first calling of Nathanael and Philip; and, therefore, four days after that of St. Andrew and St. Peter, of St. John himself, and, in all probability,

[a] St. John i. 14. [b] *Ib.* 5. [c] 1 St. John i. 2.

of St. James. With this band of newly chosen disciples, our Lord had walked from the valley of the Jordan—the scene of His Baptism—into Galilee; and He had halted at Cana, the native village of Nathanael. A wedding-feast was being kept by a poor family of Cana; the members of which were, it is clearly implied, on terms of intimacy with our Lord's Virgin-Mother, who had lived for so many years at the neighbouring village of Nazareth. Mary was present; and, as was natural, our Lord and His disciples were invited, probably when the feast, which generally lasted some seven days, had already been continued for three or four. The supply of wine was running short; and Mary, who, as is clear from her own *Magnificat*, had inferred from the terms of the Annunciation the unique dignity and the miraculous powers of her Divine Son, applied to Him for help in the emergency. Whether she wished Him to work a miracle, or merely stated the case to Him, leaving it in His hands to act as He saw best, is not clear from the narrative. But St. Chrysostom observes that, like His cousins, "she had not yet altogether that opinion of Him which she ought, but, because she bare Him, counted that, after the manner of other mothers, she might in all things command Him, Whom it was more fitting for her to reverence and worship as her Lord."[a] Our Lord acts as He acted when twelve years old; as He acted at a later date, when His Mother and His cousins wished to speak with Him, in the midst of a crowd of persons whom He was addressing. He will not allow that the tenderest of earthly ties can be permitted to affect the solemn and predestined sequence of actions in the estab-

[a] Hom. in Joann. xxi. § 2: Οὐδέπω γὰρ ἦν ἐχρῆν περὶ αὐτοῦ δόξαν εἶχεν· ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴ ὥδινεν αὐτὸν, ἠξίου κατὰ τὴν λοιπὴν τῶν μητέρων συνήθειαν, οὕτως ἅπαντα ἐπιτάττειν αὐτῷ, δέον ὡς Δεσπότην σέβειν καὶ προσκυνεῖν.

lishment of His kingdom. Even Mary may not hasten His resolves. "Woman, what common interest have we in this matter?" (such is the real force of the original). "Mine hour for action is not yet come."[a] Mary does not reply; she merely bids the servants attend strictly to her Son's orders, whatever they might be, in the confident expectation that He will certainly act, though she knows not how. Behind the couches on which the guests are seated, are six vessels for holding water, placed there with a view to that ceremonial washing of hands and vessels before and after meals, which was a matter of strict custom among the Jews. Our Lord desired that these vessels should be filled; the amount of water poured into them would have been, speaking roughly, about one hundred and twenty English gallons. St. John, who was an eye-witness, gives these details with great particularity; and his silence implies that our Lord did not mark, either by raising His hand, or uttering any word of command or blessing, the moment of the miraculous change. But it must have taken place immediately on the filling of the vessels; since our Lord, without any pause, desired the servants to draw from the vessels and ask the president of the feast to taste. Then it was that what had taken place was discovered; the president complimented the bridegroom on the excellence of the wine, which, contrary to the usual practice, he had reserved for a late hour in the entertainment. The president did not know the source of the supply, as did those servants, who had poured water into and were now drawing wine from the vessels of purification. But that the water of purification had become wine must have been gradually whispered among the company from guest to guest. And whatever may have been the case with others, the disciples who had

[a] St. John ii. 4.

recently followed our Lord learned a new and deeper faith in Him. To them, at least, He had "manifested forth His glory."

But what were the elements of the glory thus manifested? Wherein did the disciples discern it?

I.

First of all, then, Christ's glory was seen at Cana of Galilee, in His control over the world in which we live. As when He fed the five thousand,[a] and walked on the sea,[b] and blasted the fig tree,[c] and raised Lazarus from the dead,[d] so here it was plain that He had a power over nature which could not be accounted for in what we call a natural way.

Power over nature wins our admiration, even when it is exhibited in degrees which fall very far short of the miraculous. Why is it that we are all of us more or less interested in a display of personal prowess, which exceeds the strength and capacity of ordinary men? Why does any man of science, whose genius can discipline steam or electricity into doing some new service to human civilization, win a tribute of enthusiasm so general and sincere? Not because the feat of strength, or the new application of some natural force, has the charm of novelty; there are many new things which do not interest sensible people at all. Nor, again, chiefly because every new power which man acquires is an addition to the stock of power which the human family has at its disposal; an enrichment of man's life, if not an increase of the comforts which surround it. A deeper reason for the

[a] St. Matt. xiv. 15–21.
[b] *Ib.* 25.
[c] *Ib.* xxi. 19.
[d] St. John xi. 43, 44.

admiring interest is that, in this feat of strength, in that beneficent invention, we feel an approximation to a Power Which is above man; an approach, however distant, to the All-powerful God. Upon examination, we explain the feat of strength, or the new invention, by reference to "natural causes;" that is to say, by antecedents which fall within the lines of our observation and experience. A miracle is a fact which passes these lines; we cannot explain it by any law or agency with which we are acquainted. And since we know that order is a principle which belongs to the Life of the Being Who made this universe, and to His administration of it, we reflect that He would not dispense with His ordinary rules without some reason, whether we can detect that reason or not; and further, that no one but He Himself can dispense with them. Thus, in a miracle, man feels in the highest degree God's active Presence, and the mysterious Providence which governs His action; yet man does not suppose that, in authorizing miracles, God has abandoned order for anarchy, or has substituted caprice for principle in His government. All that man supposes is that some higher law of the universal kingdom has, for the time being, suspended the action of a lower one; but the intervention of God which such suspension implies, acts upon man's reason, as well as upon his imagination, most legitimately and powerfully. The Sovereign, Who rules always and everywhere, is deigning to make His Presence felt, and, for some particular purpose, by a particular section of His subjects.

This is the case in all true miracles, whether of prophets, as Elijah and Elisha, or of apostles, such as St. Peter and St. Paul. In all these cases God is, in a special sense, with the miracle-worker, making the material world deviate from its accustomed course, in order to do the

work of the moral, that is, of the higher world, by arresting the imagination and reason of man.

But in the miracles of prophets and apostles, there is generally more or less of labour and effort on the part of the miracle-worker. It is always plain that the power comes to him from without. He prays earnestly that he may be heard.[a] He is often doubtful, to the last, whether he will or will not be thus reinforced from above. In our Lord's case this was otherwise. The power which turned the water into wine was not obtained by prayer from Heaven, but was unfolded from within His own majestic Person. "He manifested forth His glory." The miracle was, as St. John teaches, but a ray of that glory which was resident in the Everlasting Word, veiled beneath human flesh; and that which in one of His creatures would have been an extraordinary effort, was in Him, if we may dare so to speak, a natural work, accomplished with the tranquil, unostentatious strength that marks God's Presence in nature. Those acts of Christ which other Evangelists, who compare them with average human efforts, name "signs" and "wonders," St. John commonly calls "works,"[b] because in the Son of God they were nothing more than, from the nature of the case, were to be expected. And, as such, they were accomplished without labour. At the marriage board Christ does not speak a word, or raise a hand in benediction; all is accomplished, in a moment, in deference to the silent fiat of His majestic Will. And the astonished servants, who knew that they had filled the waterpots with water, cannot distrust the witness of their senses that what was water has certainly become wine.

Yes, this was a manifestation of the glory of God's

[a] 1 Kings xviii. 36–38; 2 Kings iv. 33–35; Acts ix. 40; xxviii. 8, 9.

[b] Cf. Trench, *Miracles of our Lord*, p. 8.

creative power. "He," says St. Augustine, "on that marriage festival day made wine in those six waterpots, which He ordered to be filled with water, Who does this same thing in the vine trees every year of our lives. For just as that which the servants poured into the waterpots was by the work of the Lord turned into wine, so the rain which the clouds pour down upon us is, year by year, turned into wine by the work of this same Lord. Yet this yearly conversion of water into wine causes us no marvel, because it takes place every year; we cease to wonder at that which is so common." [a]

It should, perhaps, be said that in the miracle of Cana two ordinary processes are condensed into one; one Divine and one human, one natural and one artificial. The strange mystery of vegetable growth, wherein the moisture is absorbed into the vine tree, the blossom, and the grape; whereby the grape takes form, swells, and ripens, is one process. The vintage, and all the care and skill which assists and regulates the chemical act of fermentation, is another. Those months of natural growth and ripening, those weeks of human labour and care, are compressed by Christ into a single moment. The ordinary power of the Master of nature is manifest in the Miracle-worker; it is, as it seems to us, intensified by being exhibited in a single moment of time. But He is working in the line of His ordinary rules, both in nature and through the agency of man, only more rapidly; He is assuredly proving that He is absolute Master of that world which we men can in part subdue to our purposes, but only by the most obedient recognition of the laws which govern it.

[a] In Johann. Ev., c. 2, tr. 8: "Ipse enim fecit vinum illo die in nuptiis, in sex illis hydriis, quas impleri aquâ præcepit, qui omni anno facit hoc in vitibus. Sicut enim quod miserunt in hydrias in vinum conversum est opere Domini: sic et quod nubes fundunt in vinum convertitur ejusdem opere Domini. Illud autem non miramur quia omni anno fit: assiduitate amisit admirationem."

In this tranquil mastery of nature, in this completeness and superabundance of the miraculous result, there was most assuredly "glory." Should we, had we been there, have recognized it as such? We think we should. We should have been too fair-minded and unprejudiced to deny what was evident to the senses, and to refuse to admit its great significance. Whether we should really have done so or not, God only knows; because He only knows all the secret warps and tendencies of our separate characters and understandings so accurately as to be certain of what we should have done in a set of circumstances differing from that in which He has placed us. But we may conjecture what our course would have been, if we observe what are our thoughts and feelings towards the wonders (for such they are) which God works regularly, yearly, monthly, daily, in the world of nature.[a] If, as we watch the growth of the corn, our hearts rise with thankfulness to Him Whose work each separate blade really is; if, with the whole Church in the *Te Deum*, we own that earth as well as heaven is "full of the Majesty of His glory;" then we should probably have felt a new glow of thankfulness and love to Jesus if, with His six disciples, we had witnessed the miracle of Cana. If, on the contrary, we see, in the natural world around us, only the operation of some self-existent laws continually modifying a vast stock of eternally existing matter; then we may assume that at Cana we should have explained the miracle as a clever trick on the part of the Worker, or a stupid mistake on the part of the witnesses.

It may, of course, be urged that the very purpose of a miracle is to impress the dull minds of those who do not see God in the ordinary movements of the world of

[a] St. Aug., in Joann., c. 2, cap. ix.: "Aquam in vinum conversam quis non miretur cum hoc annis omnibus Deus in vitibus facit?"

nature and of man. But, as a rule, men who recognize a miracle have been prepared for it by God's teaching in nature, while they who see nothing of Him in the one are blind to His footsteps in the other.

II.

Another form of glory manifested by our Lord, to the Church of after ages, if not to the bystanders at Cana, is the glory of spiritual truth. To see this is harder than to discern the presence of creative power; it requires higher faculties in the soul. Yet most assuredly Christ's first miracle meant something more than a natural wonder brought about by, and indicating the presence of, superhuman power. It was, besides this, a parable and a prophecy; it was, as thoughtful expositors of Holy Scripture have perceived, a discovery of laws whereby the King of the new spiritual empire would govern His subjects. At first sight this may seem to minds of a particular cast, fanciful and arbitrary. It is impossible for them to regard the ascription of a prophetical or symbolical meaning to an act of this kind as tolerable to the common sense, as they think it, of scriptural interpretation. But would they be certainly right in this assumption, even if it were clear that our Lord was not a superhuman Person? Why is it that we feel such pleasure in studying the private lives and unimportant actions of great men? Not, assuredly, if we are capable of moderate generosity, because we hope that we shall find out something that will show them, after all, to have been no better than ourselves; but rather because we hope to study in them, on a small scale, the motives and characteristics which, as seen on the stage of public life, have swayed the fortunes of the world. Now, an

analogous relationship to this may be presumed, without fancifulness, between our Lord's several acts in the days of His flesh, and the great movements of His Providence in history. Could the Apostle St. John possibly have thought otherwise? If in Jesus of Nazareth the Eternal Word of God was really tabernacling among men, was it not natural to see in all that He did some far-reaching meaning; was it not inevitable to believe that no one of His actions could have been destitude of that same perfectness of insight and consistency of purpose which guides the course of human destiny; was it not reasonable to expect that the same characteristic principles of the One Perfect Mind would be traceable on the smaller scene as on the greater, and that the one might in consequence be a type and anticipation of the other?

Surely this was so. And as in the case of other miracles, such as the healing of the blind and the feeding the five thousand, this prophetical reference is obvious; so—not to wander from our immediate subject—we may at least see in the miracle of Cana a foreshadowing of two distinct laws of the kingdom of Christ.

1. In Christ's kingdom, as at Cana, nature is ever being silently changed into something higher and better than it was when He came to visit it. Its poor materials are being gradually transfigured.[a] Christ sits down at the board at which mankind feasts on the good things provided by the Creator; and when Nature fails, as, if un-

[a] Keble, *Lyra Innocentium*, ix. 10—

"What is this silent might,
Making our darkness light,
New wine our waters, heavenly Blood our wine?
Christ, with His Mother dear,
And all His Saints, is here;
And where they dwell is Heaven, and what they touch, Divine.

assisted, she must fail, to satisfy man's deeper wants, Grace does the rest. What is Holy Scripture, but a literature which might have been merely national and human, elevated by the Spirit of Christ into the inspired Word of God? A biographer or historian sits down to describe, naturally and simply, what he has seen and heard; and lo! an influence from above bids him select this particular and omit that, and clothes his words with a power and beauty which spiritual men felt at the first, and feel now, to be not of this world. What are the Sacraments, but poor earthly elements betokening possible purification and nourishment, converted into great and life-imparting gifts by the Presence and Word of Christ? A little water in a font, a little bread and wine lie before us; the simplest symbols of food and cleansing. And if Christ were only a memory of the past, and not a present and living Saviour, they would be no more than symbols to the end. But His Word and Blessing make them what otherwise they could not be; channels of His grace, or veils of His Presence; imperceptibly to sense, but certainly to faith. So, too, in man's natural character; the water of nature is constantly made wine by grace. Easy good-nature becomes charity towards God and man; well-exercised reason or far-sighted judgment is heightened into a lively faith which deals with the Unseen as with a reality. The natural virtues, without losing their original strength, are transformed into their spiritual counterparts; and religion bestows a grace, an intelligence, an interest in life, a consistency and loftiness of aim, which is recognized by those who do not comprehend its secret. So it was at the first. The Jewish Sanhedrin could not understand how the Apostles, unlearned and ignorant men as they were, had acquired an intellectual and moral power which awed the multitude of Jeru-

salem.[a] So it was again and again in the martyrdoms of the primitive Church; the Roman officers could not explain the majestic constancy of poor men and weak women and children, ready to answer, without ostentation, but without shrinking, for their faith with their lives, and "in nothing terrified by their adversaries."[b] So it is now, when a man who has been aimless, selfish, discontented, ill at ease with his work and with all around him, suddenly becomes light-hearted, cheerful, active, ready, and rejoicing to spend himself for others; full of the qualities which are as welcome to man as they are approved by God; of love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance.[c] How is this to be accounted for, but through His Presence Who proclaims, "Behold, I make all things new!"[d] He does not destroy what was good in the old, but He enriches it by His invigorating and transforming power; turning the water of nature into the wine of grace.

Now, as at Cana of Galilee, men see the result; they do not see the process by which it is reached. The servants only knew that the water which they had poured into the vessels had become wine. The secrecy in which the miracle was worked was like the unseen action of God in nature. We do not see growth or decay; we only register the results. And "the kingdom of God cometh not with observation."[e] There is no such thing as surprising it in the act of its advance; we only know that what was not, now is; and that a Presence from on high can alone explain its occurrence.

2. At Cana of Galilee, too, we note not merely the secret transforming power of Christ in His kingdom, but the

[a] Acts iv. 13–16. [b] Phil. i. 28. [c] Gal. v. 22, 23.
[d] Rev. xxi. 5. [e] St. Luke xvii. 20.

law of continuous improvement which marks His work. The words which the president of the feast addressed to the bridegroom, like Caiaphas' judgment that it was expedient that one man should die for the people,[a] were an unconscious utterance of high spiritual truth. "Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse."[b] That is the way of the world; that is the history of the life of animal pleasure, and even of the life of mental pleasure, when a man's horizon does not extend beyond the grave. A time comes when the keenest enjoyments of the past pall upon the taste; when the finest faculties are sensibly giving out, and everything heralds decay. "But Thou hast kept the good wine until now."[c] That is the rule of Christ in His kingdom; a rule of continuous progress from good to better, from better to best, if man will only will to have it so.

The Giver of the good wine at Cana does not fascinate the spiritual sense by the charm of His earliest gifts, and bestow only His poorer graces on the jaded faculties of His well-tried and trusted servants. For the spiritual senses which are enlisted in His service do not follow the law of bodily decay; they do not wear out; they grow in capacity with advancing years, and require as they receive higher nutriment. Doubtless the best men have their times of perplexity and darkness; from the most faithful souls, here and there, God's gifts are for awhile mysteriously withheld. But these trials, which illustrate the history of some saintly men, do but constitute an exception, which upon the whole proves the rule in question. Generally speaking, Christ keeps the good wine until the end of the feast of life; and men drink of His pleasures as out of a river,[d] only when they are leaving or have left it.

[a] St. John xviii. 14. [b] *Ib.* ii. 10. [c] *Ib.* [d] Ps. xxxvi. 8.

III.

One other form of glory was manifested by Christ at Cana; and it differs altogether from those which we have been considering. We cannot imitate Him as the Master of nature, or as Ruler in the realms of grace; these splendours belong to Him, in His unshared, unapproachable Majesty and Perfection, as our Redeemer and our God. But at Cana of Galilee He also manifested a glory which falls within our compass of imitation; He shone at that humble board with a moral glory; the glory of His condescending and tender charity.

No one of His miracles is more clearly marked by the tenderness and delicacy of His condescension than this. Condescension, as we all know, may be one of two things. It may be an awkward compromise between pride and a sense of duty, or it may be from first to last the impulse of love. Of the former, history and ordinary life will supply more examples than enough; the latter is found nowhere in a perfection which can compare with that of the Gospel history. Remark that condescension implies a real superiority, whether of character or position, or both, from which the advance is made; and then consider what this superiority was in the case of our Lord, and that He was always and necessarily conscious of it. This continuous and vivid consciousness of His true relation to the beings with whom He spent His life, is startlingly illustrated by St. John, when He narrates the washing of the disciples' feet on the eve of the Passion: "Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His Hands, and that He was come forth from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments; and took a towel, and girded Himself.

After that He began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded." [a] Who does not feel the contrast between that Divine consciousness of being Almighty and Eternal, and an action in which men could see nothing but abasement, but which was perfectly ennobled by the motive which dictated it? "He began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded."

Nor would our Lord's sense of His true place in the scale of being have been restricted to any particular times or actions in His human life. When He took His place at the feast of Cana, He knew Who and What He really was. Yet He also knew that, in the estimation of the people, He was placing Himself far below His forerunner, John the Baptist. The Baptist had a deserved reputation for austere sanctity, and a corresponding influence with the people. His ascetic life as a hermit, who shunned the haunts of men, and preached penitence to those who sought him in his wild retreat near the Jordan, attracted while it awed the minds of his countrymen.[b] Our Lord, too, was a Preacher of repentance, and His insistence upon the sterner side of religion was at least not less emphatic than St. John's. But He had part in all that was not sinful in humanity, and not only in one department or aspect of human excellence. Thus while, on the one hand, He taught the evangelical counsels of perfection, He appeared on the other at the publican's board in Capernaum, and at the marriage feast of Cana. And as some modern critics have charged Him with preaching an impossible asceticism, so others have maintained that by the miraculous supply of wine at Cana He was sanctioning a low revel, a degrading debauchery; even as the men of His day declared that He was a "glut-

[a] St. John xiii. 3-5. [b] St. Matt. iii. 1-5.

tonous man, and a winebibber,"[a] after all. In this generation as in that the children sit in the market-place, and call unto their fellows, saying, "We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented."[b] But meanwhile Wisdom is justified of her true children,[c] who see in Christ's condescending charity at Cana a ray of that Love which redeemed the world. He is present, in all senses, as one of the guests; and His conduct at the feast was marked by the tenderest consideration for the feelings of the poor family, who were making the best of their brief day of festive joy. He saved them from the disappointment of being unable to entertain their friends; He added somewhat, we may well believe, to their household store besides; but He did this in such a manner as to hide His Hand, and to lay them at the moment and before the guests under no embarrassing sense of obligation towards Himself. Had He worked the miracle immediately and publicly, when His Mother first asked His aid, it might have been otherwise. But "His hour" for working it in His own way "was not yet come;" and when He did work it, no one present knew what He was doing. His grace and bounty were only discovered afterwards and in their effects.

What is this but the glory of God's own bountiful Providence? Man, when he would assist his brother man, too often parades his benevolence; God gives us all that we have so unobtrusively, that most of us altogether forget the Giver. We are the spoiled children of His love; we credit chance, or good fortune, or our own energy or far-sightedness, with the blessings which come only from Him. Yet He does not on that account inflict upon us the perpetual sense of our indebtedness. As

[a] St. Matt. xi. 19. [b] *Ib.* 17. [c] *Ib.* 19.

it was in the beginning of human history, so it is now, and ever shall be, with this law of His love. Yet, Divine as He is in this, He is also human and imitable, so that we may copy Him. There are many duties of charity which are necessarily public; they belong to certain positions; they are valuable as stimulants and examples. But there are many also which are essentially private; and these, we may be sure, are the most welcome to our Lord, Who would not that a man's left hand should know what his right hand was doing[a] in the cause of his fellows. The best of us, my friends, have not to stoop far in order to meet the worst; we know this, if we place ourselves with sincerity in the Presence of the Son of Man. But the better we can assist our brethren, without letting them suspect that we are helping them, the more may we hope to share in that moral glory which characterizes the Divine Providence in His dealings with all of us, and which our Lord Jesus Christ manifested throughout His human life, but never more truly than at Cana in Galilee.

[a] St. Matt. vi. 3.

SERMON XXIV.

THE CONQUEST OF EVIL.

(THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.)

ROM. XII. 21.

Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

AMONG the sacred writers, St. Paul is remarkable for his sympathy with human nature and thought; a sympathy which was probably a natural endowment, enriched by the power of the Spirit of Christ. When less sensitive minds would speak and pass on, suspecting no disturbance of thought or feeling within the soul of the listener, St. Paul's sympathetic insight anticipates the exact effect of his language, and enables him, when necessary, to correct it. Thus, in the case before us, he has been inculcating several difficult duties as belonging to a serious Christian life. Christians, he says, are to think of themselves soberly and honestly; each is to remember that, as a member of the Holy Body of the Redeemer, he owes much towards all around him. All is to begin and end with love; love is to be sincere and practical; men are to make the most of their individual gifts for the sake of others; they are to be cheerful, active, enthusiastic, patient, prayerful, large-hearted, sympathetic, unambitious. They may not be self-asserting;

they must be especially forgiving, and even studiously attentive and considerate towards personal enemies. Are these things easy to flesh and blood? Are they not generally difficult? Do not the obstacles which lie in the way of attaining them appear, to such as you and I, almost insurmountable? We are slothful; we are selfish; we are ready to take offence; we are revengeful; and this gospel of a sublime charity sounds like a bitter irony when it is placed in contrast with our ordinary lives. The forces arrayed against us are so many, so subtle, so strong, that we despair of obeying the Apostolic precepts. This is what we think as we listen; and St. Paul meets us by his closing words, which are not so much an additional precept as a reassertion of all the precepts that have gone before by a practical appeal to a great principle: "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

Here are implied two things about evil: its aggressive strength, and our capacity for not merely resisting but subduing it. Let us take them in order.

I.

"Be not overcome of evil." What do we mean by evil? Evil, like good, is one of those wide and abstract words which, when we want to put our ideas into shape and order, require definition, and which, nevertheless, by reason of their width and comprehensiveness, are difficult to define. For instance, when we speak of evil, do we mean pain? No doubt pain is akin to evil, although it may accidentally become an instrument of the highest good; but pain is rather an effect and symptom of evil than evil itself. Evil itself does not belong to the physical world; it is a native of the moral world; it is

the child of a free will. Evil proper, that is, moral evil in our common language, is called sin; and the study of nature and life combines with the instinct of our consciences to teach that physical evil or pain is the effect of sin.

It is no objection to this that geology has discovered upon the surface of this planet traces of death, implying the suffering of dying beings who must have existed in periods long prior to the creation of man. For the Bible affords no reason against supposing that between the original creation of this earth and some catastrophe which would have preceded the creation of man, there may have been one or more races of beings like ourselves on their probation, whether they were in other respects like ourselves or not. Nor is the suffering which abounds in the animal world an objection to what has been said; because, apart from St. Paul's account of animal suffering as the sympathy of the lower creatures with the misery of fallen man,[a] it is probable that the animals have, in various degrees, something approaching to a moral nature, and thus that conduct in them which corresponds, however faintly, to moral evil in ourselves, is, like it, followed by suffering.

What, then, is this moral evil, which is the cause of all other evil? It is simply unregulated desire. Desire is that quality in us which corresponds to gravitation in the physical bodies. While all is as it should be, desire keeps us moving round our true Centre; the Sun of the moral world, the Fountain of all goodness, Almighty God. Sin is the free concentration of desire upon some other centre than God; upon some created being.[b] If, in the heavenly

[a] Rom. viii. 22.

[b] Cf. St. Aug., Ep. 140. 23: "Rationalis creatura, sive in angelico spiritu, sive in animâ humanâ ita facta est ut sibi ipsi bonum quo beata fiat, esse

spheres, a planet could be detached from its true orbit, and no longer revolving around its sun, could pass within the range of other and counter attractions, the effect would be vast and irretrievable disorder. So it is in the moral world. Sin is this disorder in the governing desire of the soul, followed by a corresponding disorder in its outward action. In this disorder or vagrancy of desire there is involved a contradiction of the moral Nature or Essence of God. God being, by the terms of His Nature, the Source and Centre of all besides Himself, He cannot but make all forms of dependent and created life centre in Himself. Sin, which is the rejection of this law by the free and intelligent creature, is consequently in its principle a rejection, not of any arbitrary enactment on the part of the Supreme Being, which He could have ordered otherwise, but of that which He wills, because He is what He is, and because He would cease to be Himself if, to suppose the impossible, He could will otherwise. And as the concentration of desire on God is due to God's being what He is; so, because God is what He is, is the law which He has given us necessarily obligatory and unchangeable. We can no more suppose that lying was ever right, than that things equal to the same could ever have been unequal to one another. Moral truth is, in its principle, as distinct from its application, as eternal and necessary as is mathematical truth. If, like mathematical truth, it has been always true, it belongs to, or rather it is, the Life of the one Eternal Being, since otherwise it would be a coeternal principle

non possit; sed mutabilitas ejus si convertatur ad Incommutabile Bonum fiat beata; unde si avertatur, misera est. Aversio ejus vitium ejus, et conversio ejus, virtus ejus est." Had St. Augustine lived after Copernicus, he would have probably expressed this in terms which availed themselves of the metaphor suggested by the astronomical fact.

independent of Him. And thus sin, which contradicts this moral truth or law, is a contradiction of God, arising from disorder in those governing desires of the soul, which were intended to keep us in our true relation of obedient dependence towards Him.

Now, the strength of moral evil, or sin, is one of those facts which man is liable by turns to depreciate or to exaggerate. This tendency of the human mind is observable in the methods by which, in different ages of the world, men have endeavoured to account for the existence of evil. For that evil should exist at all in the universe of a Good and All-powerful God is the weird mystery which has engaged the earliest efforts of the conscience and understanding of man. When man has learnt to believe in the existence of one All-powerful and All-good Being—whether he have received this faith by tradition from the past, or have reached it by reflection and study—his attention is at once and necessarily arrested by the embarrassing fact that evil exists within himself and in the world around him. He is tempted to say to himself, "If I had been God, and had had to create the universe; if I had felt towards evil as God must feel towards it, and had wielded the power which God does wield, I never would have permitted this hateful thing to mar the peace and blast the happiness of my universe. I would not merely have crushed it out; I would have forbidden it to exist; it should not have been there to perpetuate my dishonour, flaunting itself before the eye and conscience of my thinking creatures, as a defiance of my power, or a stain upon my sanctity." So men have thought; and then they have gone a step further. They have asked whether the existence of evil is not a disproof of the eternal and resistless Omnipotence of God. They have imagined that evil could only be accounted for by

supposing that, side by side with the self-existent Holy One, there has existed from everlasting a self-existent evil one; a second principle of existence coeval with the First, and Its eternal antagonist. This has been the creed of millions of human beings, particularly in the East; and in such heresies as Manichæism—dead in name, but far from dead in fact—it has decked itself out in Christian phrases, and has at times pressed hard upon the hands and heart of the Church. Especially has it been prone to suppose that evil has its home in matter, while good is confined to spirit, and thus to make the frontier between the two worlds in which we pass our twofold existence, the frontier also of the kingdoms of good and evil. How little any such theory will accommodate itself to facts is obvious to any healthy conscience; we cannot but know that the most deadly sins are often purely spiritual, and have no relation whatever to the kingdom of matter.[a]

But, beyond this, the whole conception of a self-existing evil principle is inconsistent with belief in God as God. If God is not the Only Eternal, so that from everlasting nought else, whether it be intelligence or matter, has existed side by side with Him; if He is not the Alone Almighty, so that none else could exist save by His sufferance; then He is not God. It is of His Essence that He alone is Self-existent, Everlasting, All-powerful; and to imagine another, His peer in length of days and strength of arm, yet not sharing His Nature; not Himself, but external to Himself, and withal His enemy,—this is to deny that He exists at all. From the days of Mary until George III., the English kings entitled themselves, by an archæological fiction, kings of France, when they

[a] Cf. the seventeen ἔργα τῆς σαρκός in Gal. v. 19, 20; at least eight are spiritual sins.

had long ceased to reign over a yard of French territory. And the systems which would account for the origin of evil by supposing two original principles to have existed for ever side by side, can only name one of these principles God, by a fiction of a much graver character. God does not exist at all, unless He Alone has existed from Eternity.

Still, false and disastrous as is such a speculation as this, it shows us, by its prominence in the history of human thought, how energetic is man's sense of the strength and empire of evil. And it is not more disastrous or false than are attempts to escape from the difficulty in an opposite direction. Men have supposed that God is the only existing Being, in such a sense that all the other living beings, nay, all forms of existence in the universe, are not products of His creative Will, but manifestations of His present action. Everything, according to this doctrine, is literally God. The truth of God's all-pervading Presence *in* His works, is exaggerated and perverted into an identification of God *with* His works; so that every being is deemed part of God, and every act, every movement, whether of body or spirit, a manifestation of the Life of God. Now, while much else may be said of this way of looking at the universe, one thing must necessarily be said of it; it cuts out by the roots our apprehension of the malignity of evil. It fathers evil as well as good, and in the same sense as good, upon the Author of the universe: murder and adultery are treated as forms of God's Activity as well as saintly thought or practical benevolence. The inevitable result of this is that the evil of sin is first depreciated and then denied; the sharp edges of those profound distinctions, which in every healthy conscience separate sin from virtue, are rubbed and pared away, until at last, in questions of

conduct, no dividing line is perceptible between light and darkness. In a chaos which is ultimately as fatal to society as to the life of the single soul, men credit God with that from which He shrinks with loathing, and which He will assuredly punish; while, in their intercourse with each other, they "put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter." [a]

Is there no other account of evil which avoids these exaggerations? Cannot we assert the real evil of evil—the real sanctity of the One God, without ascribing evil to the direct agency of some everlasting rival of the one Author of the universe. Cannot we maintain the Omnipresence and Omnipotence of God, without crediting Him with that which is opposed to His moral Nature, and which, if it could be sufficiently strengthened and enhanced, would certainly annihilate Him?

The Christian Revelation teaches us that there is no necessity either for supposing an eternal evil principle in order to maintain the evil of evil, or for crediting God with evil in order to uphold His primal and solitary Omnipotence. Evil is the work, not of God, but of His creature: He could not have created it directly without contradicting Himself. Evil is a result of the abuse of God's highest gift to a created being—his free-will. If God was not to stint His creation down to those levels of existence, at which His creatures should serve Him always and inevitably, either by obeying fixed laws, or by obeying irresistible instincts; if He was to create beings whose high prerogative it should be freely to choose Him as their end and portion; then, as a necessary condition of this freedom, such beings must be free to refuse to choose Him. And in this refusal lies the very essence of evil; evil is the creature's repudiation of the law of its being, by turning away its desire from Him Who is the Sun

[a] Isa. v. 20.

around which it should move, the Source as well as the End of its existence. If it be urged that God, in making man free, must have foreseen that man would thus abuse his freedom; it must be replied that God's horizons are more extensive than ours. We may not unreasonably suppose, or rather we may be sure, that God foresaw in the cure of evil a good which would more than counterbalance its existence; that "if sin abounded, grace would much more abound."[a]

This account of the existence of evil does not extenuate its seriousness. Evil, according to the Christian Revelation, is the perversion of God's highest gift; it is His most conspicuous generosity turned against Himself. Evil is older than human history; it had its throne and its victims among beings compared with whom man is but of yesterday, and who are vastly his superiors in intelligence and strength. It is a mighty tradition, coming to us from another world, and gathering strength as it has passed across the centuries, and it marshals at this hour in its enthusiastic service millions of human intellects and human wills, to say nothing of those wills and intellects which are keener and stronger than belong to man. For now, as eighteen hundred years ago, we Christians "wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."[b] There is a hierarchy among the fallen angels; there is discipline and organization among the emissaries of hell. And at the head of this hierarchy, controlling that organization, there is one being, so much stronger and abler than the rest, that Scripture speaks of him in terms which, if they stood alone, might lead us to suppose that he was our only

[a] Rom. v. 20. [b] Eph. vi. 12.

adversary. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walketh about, as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith." [a] How strong is his hand is clear to any who looks steadily at what passes before our eyes. In those fields of blood [b] abroad, the product of ambitions or hatreds which he has inspired, in each and all of our social and personal sores at home, we see his handiwork. Certainly he is no novice at his trade, and he comes to us endowed with a vast experience. Sometimes he works stealthily, making no great noise in the world, and bidding us dream our dreams of some indefinite improvement to be worked out by material civilization. At other times, as now, he flaunts himself ostentatiously on the summits of contemporary history; dealing out, in the centres of what we term our highest civilization, his message of blood and death, as though, as of old in the Apocalypse, "he had come down, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time." [c] But in either case he is a hard and patient and far-sighted worker, always preparing his strategy for some new conquest, or making the best of an old one. And how clever he is in outwitting his victims, is obvious when we mark that, like a general of consummate skill, he so disguises his movements as to lead too many of us to believe that he is doing nothing at all; if indeed he does not succeed in persuading us that he is merely a rhetorical expression for a pure abstraction; that he has no real personal existence; and that we may safely put the statements of Holy Scripture about him upon a very high shelf in our minds, as belonging to the unscientific absurdities of a bygone age. Certainly, when he has done this, and we bandy his odious

[a] 1 St. Pet. v. 8, 9.

[b] The Franco-German War of 1870–1871 was still raging.

[b] Rev. xii. 12.

name about among each other as if he were a half-tragic, half-comic personage in an amusing but exploded fairy tale, his game is sufficiently secure. But his dupes, alas! are not exactly in a position, whether intellectual or moral, to do justice to the deadly art which has secured it.

Surely, if one thing is more wonderful than another, amid the many mysteries which surround the presence of evil in the world of a Good and Mighty God, it is the enthusiasm with which it is propagated. In this great city it has, at this hour, its earnest missionaries and apostles; it creates and disseminates entire literatures; here intelligent, refined, cultured; there passionate, licentious, blasphemous, revolting. It makes its converts, and then enlists them in the work of conversion; it retreats, when it does retreat, only that it may advance the better. Everywhere it gives the impression, not of an inert obstacle to goodness, but of the energetic, intelligent, onward movement of a personal agency. Behind its various forms we detect the touch, the tread, the breath, of an antagonist who would be glad to disguise from us his presence, but whose presence can only explain all that we see.

Thus it was that St. Paul felt when, looking out upon the world, in his Epistle to the Romans, he culled some of the sternest and most sweeping sentences from the Psalter in order to describe it. "Jews and Gentiles," he said, "are all under sin; as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips;[a] . . . the

[a] Rom. iii. 9–13.

way of peace have they not known, and there is no fear of God before their eyes."[a] It might at first sound declamatory and exaggerated. But if you could have stripped from the society of the ancient world the tinsel and whitewash that covered up its substantial wickedness, you would have understood that the Apostle was only describing a matter of fact. It was, indeed, this empire of evil which our Lord confronted by His Incarnation and by His Cross. His precious Death is the true measure of its mischief and malignity. We cannot really say whether, if evil had never existed, the Only Begotten would for other purposes have entered, by an Incarnation, into the sphere of time and sense. But we do know that, as things are, His Precious Blood is the price as well as the antidote of sin. It at once forbids us either to underrate sin's strength, or to despair of conquering it.

II.

"Be not overcome of evil." Evil is not a resistless invader; it is not even invincible. It is not the work of an eternal being or principle. Strong as it is, it is only a product of created wills. If the Oriental belief in a second principle were true, we might resign ourselves to evil as inevitable; if the Pantheistic belief in the identification of God with all created activity were true, we might learn to regard evil with complacency. As Christians, we know it to be hateful and yet not invincible. It is our duty, as the Apostle tells us, to abhor evil;[b] yet it is also our duty, as it is within our power, to overcome it. True, evil often beleaguers the city of the soul like an investing host, which, besides cutting off supplies

[a] Rom. iii. 17, 18. [b] *Ib.* xii. 9.

of strength from without, finds confederates in our weaknesses and passions within; and ever and anon it makes an assault which might even prove fatal. But for all that, evil is not our master; it may be vanquished, not by its own weapons, but by weapons of another kind; "overcome evil," says the Apostle, "with good."

"With good." Like evil, good is not a mere abstraction; it is, in fact, a living Person. If evil is personified in Satan, good is personified in Christ. If the Personification of evil is to be conquered, he must be conquered by the Personification of goodness. Christ and His cleansing Blood, Christ and the grace of His Spirit and His Sacraments, Christ and the virtues which He creates in man, are more than a match for evil, whether in the devil or in the world, whether in ourselves or in others. His patience is stronger than the world's violence, His gentleness than its brutal rudeness, His humility than its lofty scorn, His Divine charity than its cruelty and hatred.

"Overcome evil with good." This was the principle of the early Christians; this was the law by obedience to which the world was subdued to Christ. If the first Christians had tried to conquer evil with evil, to beat the world with its own weapons, they must have failed altogether. The old heathen society was much too clever and too strong to be discomfited by any rival in its own line of action; it had intellect, wealth, possession of the field, untold social and political power on its side; it had sophists and philosophers in the world of thought, and armies, police, statesmen, in the world of public life. Against these the Church had nothing to produce, at least of the same kind; yet it conquered. It conquered through the might of goodness;[a] goodness inspired and

[a] Although Gibbon, in paragraphs which Dean Milman has termed the "most uncandid" of his *History*, misrepresents the moral character formed

sustained by the grace of Christ. "The weapons of our warfare," said an Apostle, "are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds."[a] The passive virtues of the Christian martyrs were stronger than the active energies of their heathen persecutors; stronger, that is, in the end. They had before them a new Ideal; the image of an Immaculate Sufferer, "Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, threatened not."[b] The scaffold on which He died was the symbol of His glory. If the Cross could be translated into a precept, it would bid us "overcome evil with good." To conquer by suffering was a new thing in the world's history; but to conquer by suffering willingly for the glory of God, was to overcome evil by the power of goodness; it was to awe unhappy souls, conscious of inward restlessness and pain, by the spectacle of souls moving, though amidst tortures, with tranquil determination around the true Centre of their being. The Apostles, who understood this, were sure of the issue from the first; nor, in the end, were they disappointed. And if there are any now, whether men or parties, who are objects of persecution, whose good is evil spoken of, or whose mistakes are exaggerated, and they are tempted, should opportunity present itself, to make reprisals, and to pay back their opponents in their own coin, let them be sure that to yield to this temptation is to gratify passion at the expense of all that is really worth struggling for. Evil is not really to be overcome with evil, but only with good, that is, with active, patient goodness; and to

by Christianity, he still makes the virtues of the first Christians the fourth of those five causes to which he attributes the triumph of the Faith of Christ (*Decline and Fall*, vol. ii. chap. xv. § 4, p. 182, note *a*; ed. Smith. Murray: 1862).

[a] 2 Cor. x. 4. [b] 1 St. Pet. ii. 23.

recriminate in word or act is to forfeit a strong moral position; it is to part company with the blessedness and strength of the saints who have endured with their eye on the Invisible.

"Overcome evil with good." This is a good rule for a young man who has been religiously brought up in a country home, and who, on coming to begin the business of life in London, enters one of those great establishments which are to be found not a hundred yards from this Cathedral. He finds himself in a society made up of very various characters; but it is very unlike that which he left at home. He is invited to see life; he is rallied gently or coarsely on the score of his country prejudices; he is told that people, who really know what is to be said about such subjects, think cheaply of the Church and the Bible, and laugh at the notion that prayer has any power with God. At first he is much distressed at hearing these things, but in time his ear becomes accustomed to them. Then he becomes more or less intimate with a particular section of his associates; and he is urged to break with the prejudices of his babyhood, and to enjoy life like a man. He is advised to do as he likes, that is, to sin with a high hand; and to say whatever he likes, that is, to blaspheme the Name and Work of his Redeemer. It is hard to resist, for he has been going down the hill for some time, and his descent has gained impetus. But resist he must; it is a struggle for his life. And there is One hard by, ready to hear him, if he will ask for aid; ready to help him in the hard task of overcoming the evil around him with good. Simple decision, perfectly courteous, but unswervingly determined, will carry the day. Sin may talk loud and bluster, but at heart it is a coward; it skulks away at the show of a strong resistance. There may be hard work at first;

but in the event, purity, and straightforwardness, and charitableness, and reverence will win the battle; opposition will melt away into silence, silence into respect, respect into sympathy, sympathy into imitation. "Thou art of more honour and might than the hills of the robbers. . . . At Thy rebuke, O God of Jacob," though it be uttered by the lowliest of Thy servants—"both the chariot and the horse are fallen."[a]

"Overcome evil with good." Here is a precept to be taken to heart by any of us who has to live with a relation of an irritable temper; a husband, a wife, a parent. Hours, days, weeks, months, years, pass, and there is no change; nothing but a continuous friction, a quiet persevering bickering, which makes the worst of every petty circumstance, and keeps up an uninterrupted sense of regulated soreness. This petty misery is not uncommon. Many Christians, who keep their grosser passions under restraint, appear to compensate themselves by indulging in faults of temper, and thus they become a great trial to the patience of those who live with them. Such may, perhaps, exclaim with the Psalmist, "Woe is me, that I am constrained to dwell with Mesech, and to have my habitation among the tents of Kedar! My soul hath long dwelt among them that are enemies unto peace. I labour for peace; but when I speak unto them thereof, they make them ready for battle."[b] But it were better to do something more; to overcome this vexatious evil with good; to conquer this irritating irritability by unfailing and Christ-like sweetness. Difficult this, too, no doubt, my brethren, for such as are you and I; impossible to unassisted nature. But possible enough, thank God, for any of us, through His wonder-working grace.

These are the prosaic realities, the trivial incidents of

[a] Ps. lxxvi. 4, 6. [b] *Ib.* cxx. 4-6.

ordinary life; and we seem to be a long way from those thoughts among which we were moving just now, about the nature of evil, and the mystery of its existence, and the tragic prominence of its place in human history, and God's reasons for permitting, and methods of dealing with it. But, in truth, the same subject is before us, only in its concrete and everyday form. It is in the light of these great considerations that we perceive how little the humblest Christian lives differ from those which we deem the highest. Each has proceeded from the same Creative Hand; each is washed in the same Cleansing Blood; each is sanctified by the same Eternal Spirit; each is offered the same Heavenly Food; each has before it Death, Judgment, and Eternity. And, meanwhile, each is the scene of that mighty contest between good and evil; between the absolute Self-existent Good, and the evil which was begotten of the perverted freedom of created wills; the evil which existed when Eden as yet was not, but when already there was "war in heaven, and Michael and his angels fought against the dragon."[a] That great struggle still lasts on; the air resounds with its battle-cries; the soil is strewn with its slain; and if we would witness the shock of battle, we have but to observe what passes within our own souls and consciences. "I delight in the Law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind."[b] Compared with this spiritual combat, the outward circumstances and decorations of life are surely trivialities; since the issues of the inward struggle will have a permanent and awful meaning, when all that meets the eye of sense shall have passed away. May our Lord teach us each and all the reality and seriousness of this conflict, and the secret of victory! May He raise

[a] Rev. xii. 7. [b] Rom. vii. 22, 23.

our eyes above the narrow horizons which too often bound our waking thoughts; and bid them rest on those eternal hills from whence cometh our help;[a] and whisper to us the grandeur as well as the peril of our destiny; and convince us by a practical experience that, weak as we are, we can be more than conquerors through Him That loved us;[b] conquerors of each aggressive form of evil by its antagonist form of good!

[a] Ps. cxxi. 1. [b] Rom. viii. 37.

SERMON XXV.

ST. PAUL'S AND LONDON.[a]

(FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.)

ST. MATT. v. 14.

A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

WHEN, by pronouncing the eight Beatitudes, in the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord has described the character of the citizens of that Kingdom of Heaven which He was setting up upon the earth, He goes on to define their relation to the external world, or, as we should say, the nature of their influence. He does this by terming them first of all, the "salt of the earth," and next, the "light of the world." Of these figures, the first in the order of our Lord's discourse is last in the order of historical fact: Christians must be, at least, to a certain extent, the light of the world before they can be its salt; they must illuminate it before they can save it from its corruptions. It is upon the second of the two comparisons that our Lord dwells more at length. A startling assertion it must have seemed when addressed to a company of Galilæan peasants—"Ye are the light of the world." But from such a greeting the duty naturally follows: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your

[a] When originally published, this sermon was dedicated to Sir Thomas Dakin, Bart., Lord Mayor of London in 1871.

good works, and glorify your Father Which is in Heaven." Our Lord connects this duty with the metaphor which it expands, by insisting on the nature of the case, and by an appeal to our common sense. In the proverb, "A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid," He implies that whether His disciples will it or not, they cannot, in their corporate capacity as His Church, avoid living much before the eyes of men. In the homely argument that "men do not light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick," He does not merely remind His followers of that which they owe to His gift of light; He vindicates and explains His own Providence. If it was well for Him to found a Temple of the Truth on earth at all, it was surely well that this Temple should be raised on high, and that all eyes should see it.

I.

By this double image of a "city set on an hill" Jesus Christ connects His work as Founder of the Church with some of the grandest anticipations of ancient Prophecy. The coming dispensation, in which Israel would have a glorious part, yet which would be much too vast to be compressed within the territorial frontiers of Palestine, is described sometimes as a city, sometimes as a mountain. Each image was undoubtedly suggested by the actual site and structure of ancient Jerusalem. "The hill of Sion," cries a Psalmist in a transport of enthusiasm, "is a fair place and the joy of the whole earth: upon the north side lieth the city of the Great King: God is well known in her palaces as a sure Refuge."[a] Isaiah, in vision, sees the Church of Christendom under either image: "It shall come to pass in the last days, that the Mountain of

[a] Ps. xlviii. 2.

the Lord's House shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the Mountain of the Lord, to the House of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem."[a] Again, "In this Mountain shall the Lord of Hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined. And He will destroy in this Mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces."[b] Again, "In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong City; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation that keepeth the truth may enter in."[c] So the Psalmist, as already referred to, shadows out the future and the spiritual under the actual and material Jerusalem: "Great is the Lord and highly to be praised in the city of our God, even upon His Holy Hill. . . . Walk about Sion, and go round about her, and tell the towers thereof."[d] And the same sense is discoverable in the deeper meaning of such prayers as that of an exile, "O send out Thy light and Thy truth, that they may lead me, and bring me to Thy Holy Hill, and to Thy Dwelling."[e] Accordingly, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the two images are blended in the reality: "Ye are come," cries the Apostle, "unto Mount Sion, and unto the City of the living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem."[f]

[a] Isa. ii. 2, 3; cf. Mic. iv. 1, 2. [b] Isa. xxv. 6–8. [c] *Ib.* xxvi. 1, 2.
[d] Ps. xlviii. 1, 12. [e] Ps. xliii. 3. [f] Heb. xii. 22.

Of these figures, the mountain suggests elevation above the level of other institutions; the city implies defensive walls, defying the assaults of foes without, while it means life, movement, organization, within. But beyond these specific ideas suggested by the two images, there is a common idea in which they meet, and which, it is evident from the context, our Lord meant to insist upon. This idea is—publicity. The hill or mountain arrests all eyes, as, rising from the plain, it cuts the distant horizon. The city "set on an hill" is not merely visible from afar, as it throws towers, spires, minarets, domes, high against the sky; it is, from the nature of the case, a common home and thoroughfare of men, in which men pass their lives close to each other, for purposes of mutual intercourse and support, if not, as in most cases originally, for purposes of common defence and safety.

There are other sayings of our Divine Lord, with which, at first sight, this doctrine of the publicity of the Church has been supposed to be at variance. Thus He insists with repeated earnestness on the importance of the inward life as distinct from the outward; on the folly of making clean the cup and the platter while the inward parts are full of wickedness.[a] He proclaims that secret prayer will be rewarded openly by our Heavenly Father,[b] on account of its freedom from the taint of hypocrisy, that is, of keeping up an outward appearance to which nothing corresponds within. He rules, in the same sense, that fasting and almsgiving are all the better for being practised as quietly as possible; that the Kingdom of God cometh not with observation; that men are not to look for outward signs of it too eagerly, "saying, lo! here, or lo! there, for behold the Kingdom of God is within you,"[c]

[a] St. Matt. xxiii. 25; St. Luke xi. 39. [b] St. Matt. vi. 6.
[c] St. Matt. vi. 1, 16; St. Luke xvii. 20, 21.

There is much else to the same purpose in His teaching,[a] and its general drift may at first lead us to treat the outward publicity of the Church as non-essential; "the King's daughter" being, as the Psalmist has it, "all glorious within."[b]

And yet nothing is more certain than that, when, with His Eye resting upon the Christian centuries represented for the moment by the little company before Him, our Lord addresses His followers, in this passage, as constituting in their entirety a "city set on an hill," He does, as in many other passages, imply the visible publicity of His Church. There was no real contradiction in His teaching; the supreme importance of the inward life of His servants did not imply indifference to their public association in the face of the world. Nor would this ever have been questioned, had it not been from the supposed controversial necessities of a time when corruptions first, and divisions afterwards, had broken up the visible fabric of Christendom, and had led men to read the words of Christ, with eyes dimmed by tears at the seeming failure of the Christian promises, or blinded by the hot dust of ferocious controversy. A family is not less a family, because its members are not on speaking terms, or have not been so for some time; the tie of blood underlies the temporary separation; the family is still a social fact; and such, with all its divisions, is the Christian Church. As Christ did not come among us as an invisible Spirit, but took a bodily form, and was seen and heard, and even, as St. John says, handled;[c] so His Church, which carries the Incarnation of the Divine Wisdom onwards into history, is not a secret society, or a mere union of feelings or convictions, but a visible association of men. Here on earth, indeed, she shares not the perfection of her Im-

[a] St. John xviii. 36; St. Luke xii. 15; St. Matt. vii. 21; xxiii. 12.
[b] Ps. xlv. 14. [c] St. Luke xxiv. 39; 1 St. John i. 1.

maculate Lord; yet she retains, even at times of her utmost depression, enough of His mien and manner about her to proclaim her heavenly relationship. Here on earth, too frequently and too long, she has been divided; but each separated section has a bad conscience at its separation from the rest, in proportion to the strength with which the pulse of Christian life beats within it, while each retains its organic capacity for a recovered union. Meanwhile, despite these stains of sin, and these rents of separation, the Church of Christ is, as a whole, a public and visible fact; having a place and name among men, and, as Bishop Butler points out,[a] perpetually recalling their attention to those truths of religion of which, if unassisted, they would soon lose sight under the pressure of the things of sense. This is, I say, a chief, though by no means the only reason for the visibility of the Church; she thus asserts, by the fact of her existence, the paramount importance of the claims of Christ; she is, from generation to generation, a public advertisement of the truth that God has not left men to themselves; that He has spoken; that His message is abroad among men, and "believed on in the world;" that "the Kingdom of God is preached," and that every man who is alive to the seriousness of life, "presseth into it." Undoubtedly her real strength and beauty are within; but her outward being and form are of themselves a proclamation of the Great King, which all men, more or less intelligently and consciously, decipher for themselves when they think at all.

Thus it was in the first age. The Apostolical Church was indeed humble, according to all rules of intellectual and social measurement; "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, were called."[b] On nearer examination, it often exhibited, as at Corinth,

[a] *Analogy*, part ii. chap. i. p. 151.

[b] 1 Cor. i. 26.

serious internal dissensions and scandals. "I hear that there be divisions among you, and I partly believe it."[a] "It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles."[b] This Church was nevertheless a society visibly organized, and acting upon the external world of thought and life with the force of a public body. Men could not watch it, and be uninterested in its object. Why did it exist? What was the reason for people holding so together? What did they do when they met early in the morning, or as at Troas, in the dead of the night? Why was a new association necessary? Why could they not be content with the old social ties of heathenism or Judaism? These were questions which must inevitably have been raised; and the answer was, that "God had so loved the world that He had given His only begotten Son" to a Life of humiliation and to a Death of pain, "that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Loyalty to that faith; the determination to live by it, to proclaim it, to propagate it, was the animating and combining motive of the new society. It had no other reason to give for its existence, at least, to those who did not belong to it; but by its existence it kept this reason high among the thoughts of observant men; it almost inflicted the truth which had created it upon the senses of a reluctant world; do what it would, the City of God had been set on an hill since the day of Pentecost, and it could not now be hid.

This publicity, which is an attribute of the Church's life, is also characteristic of the lives of her pioneers and missionaries; of none more than of that great Apostle, whose "wonderful Conversion" we had in solemn remem-

[a] 1 Cor. xi. 18; cf. 1 Cor. i. 10, 11; iii. 3. [b] *Ib.* v. 1.

brance last Wednesday,[a] and whose name has been linked for so many centuries with this, the Cathedral Church of London. St. Paul had, indeed, an inward life hidden from the eyes of men; a life begun and deepened during a three years' retirement in the desert of Arabia after his conversion; a life fed and renewed, again and again, in prayer, which was at once rest from, and preparation for, his mighty work. St. Paul taught from experience that the true life of the Christian is "hid with Christ in God;"[b] the soul being as absorbed in the contemplation of God in His Blessed Son, as if no other beings existed save the soul and the Object of its existence. "To me to live is Christ."[c] "The life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God."[d] Yet what a public life is St. Paul's! of what varied forms of activity is it made up! He is a rapid writer; he is constantly speaking in public and to unfriendly audiences; he is a keen dialectician in controversy; he is a vigorous administrator; he is an unwearied philanthropist. His years were spent, as he himself tells us, "in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the Churches."[e] And thus, while careful not to build upon another man's foundation, he nevertheless could say, at a comparatively early date in his career, that "from Jerusalem and round about unto Illyricum he had fully preached the Gospel of Christ."[f] He had the sublime and terrible consciousness

[a] January 25. [b] Col. iii. 3. [c] Phil. i. 21.
[d] Gal. ii. 20. [e] 2 Cor. xi. 26–28. [f] Rom. xv. 19.

of "being a sweet savour of Christ" in every place, "in them that are saved and in them that perish: to the one a savour of death unto death, and to the other a savour of life unto life."[a] He was not, he said with intrepid simplicity, "ashamed of the Gospel of Christ;" he passed his life in proclaiming it; since it was, he knew, "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."[b]

It was once supposed that this great Apostle set foot upon the shores of Britain, before he sealed his testimony to his Lord by his martyrdom at Rome. But if modern investigations leave no room for so intimate an association as this of English Christianity with St. Paul; we nevertheless have, in this Cathedral, a national as well as a diocesan link with him, upon which it is my purpose to insist somewhat more at length, and with reference to a practical and public duty.

II.

Whether we consider the matter historically, ecclesiastically, or spiritually, St. Paul's Cathedral is in this like the Visible Church; it is "a city set on an hill" in the thoughts of all well-informed Englishmen.

1. St. Paul's has been the central sacred spot in London, since London has been Christian. Upon this site, where, as it would seem, the heathen goddess Diana was once worshipped as patroness of their sports by the officers of the Roman prætorian camp, who hunted in the neighbouring forest, Christ our Lord has been adored for, at the least, some thirteen hundred years.[c] Either during

[a] 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16. [b] Rom. i. 16.

[c] Cf. *Annals of St. Paul's Cathedral*, by Henry Hart Milman, D.D., late Dean of St. Paul's, pp. 3–10.

the Roman occupation itself, or, at latest, in the early days of the Saxon city, whose outer wall extended at farthest half-way down Ludgate Hill, the great teacher who had so perseveringly preached among the Gentiles the "unsearchable riches of Christ" gave his name to this temple of our Divine Redeemer. Since then it has undergone vicissitudes which it is no part of my business to trace in detail, because the present fabric, as every one knows, is altogether a modern Church. The Great Fire of London left a ruin which, after a momentary hesitation, it was felt necessary to remove; and the present building has not yet seen its two hundredth birthday.[a]

Looking at the matter from one point of view, we might regret that the St. Paul's of our day has no visible connection with the great Cathedral which stood on this world-famed site during the most stirring and critical periods of English Church history. But from another point of view we may find matter for congratulation in the modern origin of the present edifice. It has been said of the Reformation that, whatever else it achieved or swept away, it sounded the death-knell of Christian art. In such a criticism there is truth so far as this; the Reformation involved a conflict of principles between, on the one hand, Churches conscious of their right to a self-government, controlled only by their allegiance to the sacred Scriptures and to the traditions of undivided Christendom, and, on the other, an illegitimate and encroaching central authority. It was natural that at the time, and for long after, this conflict of principles should withdraw men's attention from the outward mien and expression of religion to the practical interests at stake. The man who believes that he is struggling for his liberty or for his life, does not stop in the heat of the conflict to adjust his dress,

[a] Cf. *Annals of St. Paul's*, p. 388.

or to smooth his hair; although it does not follow that this omission commits him to a lifelong habit of untidiness. Certainly, in the centuries that preceded the Reformation, the religious use of art had been the scene and pretext of some conspicuous abuses; and the reaction, which reached its limit in the destructive fanaticism of the Puritan period, was perhaps more natural than we, at this time, can entirely understand. Art, after all, is but the drapery of religion: religion can use art, she can profit by it, but she can dispense with it, if need be; the life of religion resides in those activities of thought and will concentrated upon the Being of beings, and upon that which He has revealed, whereby man is enabled to attain the true goal of his destiny. Yet it is paradoxical to suppose that in the sixteenth century, or at any other period, the Church intended to promote a final divorce between religion and art. Should the Church object to the service of art, whether it be painting, or sculpture, or architecture, as an instrument for propagating and illustrating religious truth, while she retains a Bible in which the highest poetry is the consecrated handmaid of the inspiration of David and of Isaiah, she would be altogether inconsistent. Poetry, like painting, may, of course, usurp the honours of that truth to which it ministers. But the scholar who should forget the spiritual teaching of the Evangelical Prophet in admiration of his matchless poetry, would not really furnish an argument for omitting the most beautiful book of the Old Testament from the public services of the Church.

To the criticism in question, and as a whole, St. Paul's is a magnificent rejoinder; it is, indeed, the only splendid Cathedral that has been erected in England[a] or in Europe

[a] Had the Cathedral of Truro been built when this sermon was preached, it would have obliged the preacher to express himself more guardedly.

since the Reformation. After the Great Fire, London set itself to rebuild the wasted houses of God with an energy which no city in Europe has in modern times surpassed, and among these, chiefest of these, in rebuilding St. Paul's. St. Paul's was the work, not of this great city alone, not of this diocese alone; but of the whole Church and country. The rebuilding was announced in letters patent under the Great Seal of England; it was carried out by subscriptions raised throughout the country, and by taxation in the cities of London and Westminster. It was—so run the king's letters patent—to be built "to the glory of God, and for the promotion of the Divine Service therein to be celebrated;" it was, according to the same authority, "to equal if not to exceed the magnificence of the former cathedral church when it was in its best estate, and so to become, much more than formerly, the principal ornament of our royal city, to the honour of our government and of this our realm."[a]

And this splendid enterprise was not far from completion —regard being had to the vastness of the work already achieved—when it looked as though the natural results of the sacrifice and efforts of the English people, and of the consummate genius of their great architect, Sir Christopher Wren, were, after all, to be forfeited. It seemed that the old taunt might be justified after all, and at the very moment of its refutation; and that when St. Paul's had reached a point at which, for exquisiteness of outline and form, it stands almost alone amid the churches of Europe, it was to be rigidly denied all that might be gained by ornamentation and colour. We will not linger on the sad story of the public mistakes and petty jealousies which so cruelly blighted the hopes of the great architect in his declining years; since these have been recently

[a] Quoted by Milman, *Annals*, pp. 389, 390.

described by one whose name can never be mentioned in connection with this Cathedral but in terms of grateful honour—the late Dean Milman. To quote his plaintive summary, "Besides the interference with his designs for the interior embellishment of the Cathedral, Wren might look with some disappointment on the incompleteness of his work; on the temporary windows, mean and incongruous, which remained, and in many parts still remain in our own day; on the cold, unadorned east end, for which he had designed a splendid Baldachin;[a] and, in general, on the nakedness of the walls, which he had intended to relieve, perhaps with marble, certainly with rich mosaics.[b]

Doubtless this later church has had glories of its own; some of them attested by the monuments around us, and some which live only in history. There is no occasion for recalling greatness of another order, such as must occur to you who are seated within a few yards of the dust of Nelson and of Wellington. But the most thoughtful, perhaps, of English divines, during the last three centuries, if not since the days of St. Anselm of Canterbury, was Dean of this church from 1740 to 1750. It is difficult to think without emotion that for ten years, within these present walls, the voice was heard, the face was seen, of Joseph Butler, the author of the *Analogy of Religion*. Would that in these days of much mental distress, and (must it not be added?) of much shallow and off-hand thinking and talking on the subject of religion, that great work were more widely known, both for the sake of its actual contents, and in view of the wide and fruitful applicability of its argument! But Butler, and others who might be named, would not have

[a] This reproach, it may be hoped, has been partly removed by the erection of the Reredos in 1888.

[b] *Annals of St. Paul's*, pp. 446, 447.

less truly belonged to St. Paul's, had St. Paul's been completed. The question for us is, whether the work of Wren is still to continue an unclothed skeleton; whether the seventeenth century, with its poorer resources of wealth and art, is still to reproach the nineteenth as having shown, at least here, a stronger enthusiasm for God's glory; whether this "city set on an hill" before England and Europe is to be always conspicuous, not merely for the high eminence of beauty at which its first founders aimed, but for the failure of succeeding generations to attain it.

2. Yet the historical interest of St. Paul's is even inferior to the commanding importance of its site. Taken altogether, this church is, in point of practical prominence, the most important ecclesiastical building in the country.

It may not be the most beautiful: we need not challenge the graces of Lincoln, of Durham, of Westminster. They belong to a different category of beauty; and while they may be compared with each other, they cannot be compared with St. Paul's. Nor is it first in ecclesiastical rank: it is, as we all know, subject to the Metropolitan Church of Canterbury; and it cannot, as do York and Canterbury, claim the honours of a metropolitan church at all. But, apart from these questions of taste and precedence, the superior importance of St. Paul's lies in one simple and eloquent fact: it is the Cathedral Church of London. Of this mighty city, the capital of England, the capital of this vast empire, the capital, at least in more respects than one, of the civilized world, St. Paul's is the representative Christian edifice. Nor is its outward form and fabric unworthy of its position. It must have been just approaching its present state, when Butler penned his classical sentence on the purpose of a Visible Church; and while writing he would probably

have had St. Paul's in his eye. As this mighty dome towers above all the surrounding mass of buildings, and not seldom even above the dense atmosphere, which attests year by year, more and more surprisingly, the onward march of your vast industrial civilization; as it thus lifts high into the upper skies the symbol of our Lord's Work, and of His Victory; it seems silently to prolong our own Apostle's determination to glory only in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ;[a] it is a public advertisement, seen and understood by all, of the power and the triumph of Christianity. No child of the four millions of London has not at some time set eyes on it; no visitor, be he English or foreign, be he Christian, or Turk, or heathen, omits at some time to visit it. While Canterbury or York count their scores of pilgrims, St. Paul's reckons its thousands; in no other English church does the English people feel itself so thoroughly at home; and if it were to be wished that of the thousands who visit this sanctuary more could come to seek an opportunity for retreat from the pressure of the world without, and for quiet communion with their God; it is, at least, better that people should come here on almost any conditions, than not at all; it must do them some indirect good even to "walk about Sion, and go round about her, and tell the towers thereof."[b]

But, then, St. Paul's is a "city set on an hill;" and in proportion to the world-wide publicity which it inevitably challenges, is the surprise of the world at seeing it as it is. Alas for the contrast between the ideal and the actual; between the magnificent exterior and the dreary waste within! Who has not marked in the enthusiastic colonist who has just found his way to this, the central Sanctuary of the English race; or in the cultivated foreigner, who is curious to see a building which ranks in

[a] Gal. vi. 14. [b] Ps. xlviii. 12.

his thought with at most three or four other churches in Europe—how the first sense of pleasure which the grandeur of these vaults cannot but arouse, dies presently away into a blank surprise, or into something like a scornful pity, as he studies the detail? As we read the language of his curious gaze, of his curled lip, of his impatient gesture, he seems to say, "How marvellous it is that this English people, whose bridges, and quays, and railways, and streets, and viaducts, and senates, and palaces, and museums, I have just now visited; this people, so truly imperial in its conceptions, so prodigally lavish of its wealth, when this world and its interests are in question—should be so little capable of rising to the level of a becoming generosity when it stands on the threshold of the next!"

3. A last ground of the claims of St. Paul's upon Christian London, over and above that of its historical and actual importance, lies in its great, and hitherto largely undeveloped capacities for spiritual usefulness in the coming times. It may have occurred to some who hear me that what has hitherto been pleaded belongs rather to history and archæology than to faith; that there are more important objects to be pursued than the restoration of the most magnificent cathedrals; and that as the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink, so also it is not marbles and mosaics. Most true. If, indeed, there was no more to be said than that St. Paul's has claims on lovers of art and on students of history; that St. Paul's contributes to the magnificence of London; and that London is conspicuously wanting in self-respect while she leaves her Great Church unfinished; this statement, although strictly true, would perhaps have been better urged in your Guildhall than within these sacred walls.

But whether the sense of civic dignity may or may not be trusted to do justice to itself, we Christians should at least be mindful of the honour of our Divine Redeemer. If you ask what is the connection between His honour and the completion of this church, the answer is that it resides, not in the material, however costly, with which you may resolve to clothe this cold and dreary waste of walls, but in the moral power of a work of love. Do you think, then, that such a work will count for nothing? Do you suppose that the devotion which expresses itself in enriching the temples of the Crucified dies away into the walls, and perishes quite? If you think thus, you know little of the secrets of the moral world. In the eyes of Jesus Christ, the alabaster box of ointment which the penitent of old, in her passionate impetuosity, lavished upon His sacred Feet, had a value altogether distinct from the cost of the box, or He, be sure, would not have blessed her offering.[a] Distinct from the moral strength, which every act of sacrifice confers upon a man's own soul, is the effect of it upon the souls of others. The building or beautifying a Christian church is a visible proclamation of the importance of all that touches God's worship; and it whispers to the consciences of all who can hear, "If that which meets the eye of sense in the courts of the King of kings be so beautiful, what should not be the beauty of the spirit's clothing, when passing into His Presence, when bending beneath His Eye?"

It has been said reproachfully of the modern Church of England that she has inherited cathedrals which she knows not how to use. In the case of St. Paul's the epigram might have had a touch of additional severity, since she has actually built it. And in days when at

[a] St. Luke vii. 37–50.

most a few hundreds of listeners gathered in yonder choir, which was carefully barricaded against the rest of the church by a solid organ-screen, while the nave and aisles were treated as a museum of national monuments, and not as a church, in any practical sense, at all; the reproach was too truly justified. It was in part rolled away when, under the auspices and through the exertions of the late Dean, the Sunday Evening Services were instituted, which have already done much to restore St. Paul's to the heart of Christian London. But the late Dean also began, as you know, a series of improvements in the fabric and arrangements of the church; this opened choir, that decorated roof, yon grand instrument, are proofs of his patient interest and toil. Along this double line of improvement—of increased reverence and usefulness in our services on the one hand, and of the embellishment of the building on the other—thus traced by Dean Milman, his successor[a] in the government of the church would desire to continue. Each element of the plan will assist the progress of the other: just as in human life, the health of the soul and that of the body act and react upon each other, by a constant law of reciprocity. Each is sorely needed: we need a building that may better reflect the beauty of holiness; we need public devotions that may show forth the praises of our Redeemer far more effectively than now.[b] Poor indeed, and worthless, would be the most lavish embellishment of this great church if it were to be unaccompanied by more earnest and constant preaching of the Word of Life, by services not only more frequent and splendid than at present, but especially more reverent and earnest, more

[a] The Very Rev. H. L. Mansel, D.D., Dean of St. Paul's.

[b] Much has been done, in the direction alluded to, since the date of this sermon [1889].

instinct with the spirit of adoration, more capable of engaging the hearts as well as the lips of all who take part in them, more truly corresponding to that worship of Christ's first followers, which, by its attractive power, according to St. Paul's estimate, could win the heart of an unbelieving spectator: "Falling down, he will worship God, and confess that God is in you of a truth." [a]

And who shall say how much such services, in such a church as this, might not effect, in the coming times, for the glory of the Redeemer and for the interests of souls? We know how the pagan Russians were touched by the Liturgy of St. Chrysostom in the great Church of Constantinople; how in an earlier age the yet unconverted Augustine had been melted to tears by the hymns to which he listened in the Basilica at Milan. Who shall rule that what has been of old might not yet be? Who shall decide that of the acute heathens whom year by year our Indian empire sends to England to receive all that England can give except the religion of our Lord, some may not here learn that most precious lesson which St. Paul would have all men master? Who shall be certain that of the thousands of English people who enter this church at distant intervals, and who enter no other, protected, as they are, by its very vastness from a scrutiny which they dislike, while they come, as did Nicodemus of old, to Jesus as if "by night" [b]—some may not be won? And what if other interests than these be also in some degree at stake? At a time when the ancient Eastern Churches are looking to us for sympathy, when the separated Presbyterian communions in the North are wistfully longing for some of the sacramental and other blessings which their forefathers too hastily cast away, and when not a few earnest souls within the

[a] 1 Cor. xiv. 23-25. [b] St. John iii. 2.

Roman pale, driven well-nigh to despair by definitions which oblige them to choose between obedience to living authority and loyalty to the facts of history, are anxiously asking whether love and reverence, and zeal for God's honour, and a worthy apprehension of His Majesty, are possible elsewhere than in churches subject to the Papal Chair—who shall say what St. Paul's might not effect for the promotion of a wider understanding and fellowship among the servants of Christ than any of which as yet we dare to dream?

These are high thoughts; and—it is better not to follow on where it is only too possible to err—amid the secret counsels of the Infinite and All-Merciful. But the practical duty of the present moment is sufficiently plain. I say "of the present moment." Even at such a crisis as this, when all hearts are thrilled by the fall of Paris,[a] this appeal is not inopportune. By all means let us not forget the claims of those starving millions upon all who can feel for human suffering; let us bear well in mind how much is due to the pauperism and ignorance around our own walls here in London; let us not place the completion even of this Cathedral in competition with the claims of humanity, or of Christian education, or of Christian missions. But the crisis is one which calls for self-sacrifice in many directions; and while there is no reason for postponing the completion of St. Paul's, there are many reasons against it. Do you urge, that at any rate we should do well to wait for the conclusion of an European peace? Peace may be concluded (God grant that it may!) within a few weeks; but who can seriously suppose that a peace based upon an enforced severance of

[a] The Convention of Versailles was signed by M. Jules Favre and Count Bismarck on the day before the delivery of this sermon, January 28, 1871.

French citizens from their country, will last longer than the exhaustion of conquered France? We might wait for a generation if we wait at all; there are always reasons for delay. Meanwhile, at this moment some public acknowledgment is due to Him Who has saved us from the miseries which crush our neighbours to the dust; and how can we express this better than by completing the most national, the most representative of our churches? Already many eminent citizens and the leading companies of the City have given munificently; but, in view of the mighty task before us, what has hitherto been done is scarcely more than insignificant. If we have asked for rather more than half the cost of a single warship, it is because we are pleading for an Imperial cause. Yes, St. Paul's is, indeed, a "city set on an hill;" it is a material representation of the moral position of the Church of Christ. It is eminent by its position, eminent by its history, eminent by its outward beauty, eminent, it must be added, in its failure, in too many ways, practically to realize what is due to its position, but conspicuously is it eminent by its wholesale internal neglect and desolation. And we, the clergy of this Cathedral, of all orders, under our Dean, acting, as we do, with one mind and heart in furthering this work, confidently entreat you to help us. It is your matter, brethren, after all, rather than ours. We are but the willing instruments of an effort which you must make, if it is to be made at all. Like all corporations, we possess great powers of obstruction; but we can do little to construct without aid from without. Revenues which were once at our disposal have been largely surrendered to other hands, that they may be distributed far and wide throughout the country; and we, who for a short while have this great fabric in our charge, can only appeal, as we mean persistently to appeal,

to the generous instincts and Christian enthusiasm of our fellow-citizens on behalf of its obvious requirements. Yet it is not we, but your Cathedral Church itself, which pleads with you. We, its ministers of the hour, appear, one after another, in quick succession, each doing his work, speaking his message, and then passing to his account. But the Great Church remains, an image in the realm of sense and time of the Eternal realities; as were the hills which stood about Jerusalem. It remains, with its outline of matchless beauty, with its reproachful poverty of detail, appealed to, yet condemned by the religious aspirations, while face to face with the boundless wealth, of London. It is for you to say whether this shall be so hereafter; whether one more generation shall be permitted to pass away leaving St. Paul's, as it is, to a successor. It is for you to decide whether, by your present efforts, and by your persevering interest, a most important step is or is not to be taken in our day towards making this Church worthy, to some extent, of its great position, at the heart of the metropolis of England and of English Christendom.